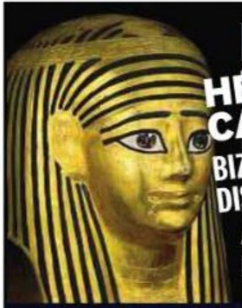

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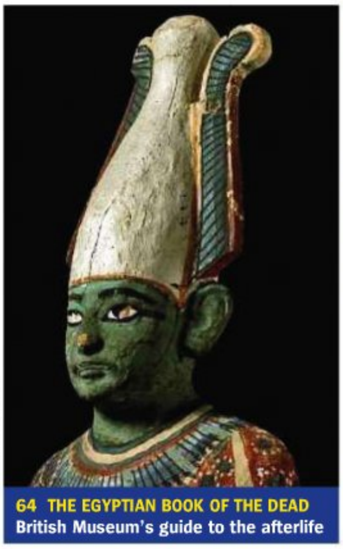
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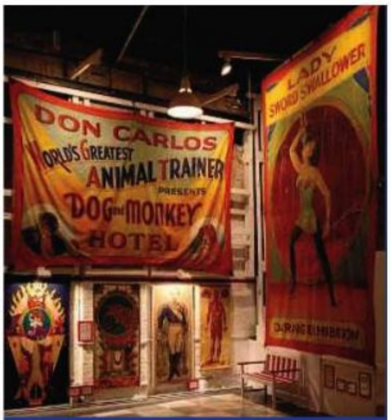

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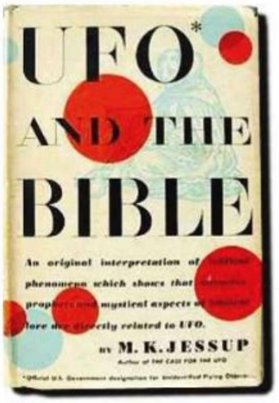
editorial

Gods and spacemen

It was probably inevitable that once the Extraterrestrial Hypothesis (ETH) became the dominant form of popular belief about UFOs that someone would have the bright idea of extending it backwards through human history to explain the 'mysteries' of the ancient world: *Chariots of the Gods* arrived at just the right time – the late 1960s, when received wisdom of every kind was being questioned – to make a splash.

But though forever associated with the 'ancient astronaut' theory, Erich von Däniken wasn't the first to suggest that the gods of earlier civilisations might have come from outer space rather than some realm of spirit. In an atomic age of declining church attendance, it was obvious that a new kind of exegesis of Holy Scripture was called for. Emmanuel Velikovsky had already 'explained' biblical episodes like the Great Flood and the parting of the Red Sea in 'scientific' terms (see **FT118:40–45**). But that left a whole slew of biblical miracles and anomalies unaccounted for; perhaps UFOs held the answer.



And so a new mythology emerged to explicate an older and increasingly distant one. In 1956, Morris K Jessup – yes, the same Morris K Jessup of 'Philadelphia Experiment' fame – published *UFO and the Bible*, in which he suggested that science and religion might come to a new understanding by re-reading the Good Book in terms of what we now 'knew' about flying saucers. By 1975, after a rash of publications taking the Jessup/von Däniken idea and running (all the way to the bank) with it, Robin Collyns could even write (in *Did Spacemen Colonise the Earth?*) that: "The arrival of the infant Christ on Earth from a spaceship is less fantastic, more credible, logical and acceptable, than the ethereal dogma taught by the Christian Church."

So, to celebrate the festive season in a suitably fortean manner, Ted Harrison asks whether the Star of Bethlehem was really a UFO and takes us on a whistle-stop tour of saucer sightings in world religions old and new (pp34–39).

Of course, there are other links between the religious and UFO experiences. Jung made the connection in his 1959 book *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky*, offering a non-literal reading of the mysterious, mandala-like visions that appeared to be filling the troubled heavens. These days, many scientists and UFO researchers alike would agree that our alien visitors come from inner rather than outer space – although once again based on a nuts-and-bolts hypothesis of a rather different kind. In the second part of their re-examination of the PC Godfrey 'abduction' case (pp46–49) Messrs Brookesmith, Clarke and Roberts speculate that the unfortunate policeman, rather than being physically removed from his car to the interior of a flying saucer, entered some kind of altered state of consciousness, possibly brought on by an epileptic seizure (the 'burst of light' and 'voice' that Godfrey reported are suggestive of just the kind of seizure which often starts in the temporal lobe of the brain, leading to anything from experiences of 'missing time' to hallucination and complete loss of consciousness).

In fact, the Temporal Lobe Epilepsy (TLE) explanation, as Emma McNeil suggests (pp54–55), would seem to offer us a fortean 'theory of everything', capable of accounting for all sorts of anomalous experiences, from timeslips to ghosts to alien abductions. While still controversial, the work of Michael Persinger on TLE has suggested that it might be responsible not just for these disturbing encounters but also for those states usually thought of as visionary or spiritual – the province of religion. Persinger believes that by stimulating the temporal lobe with his 'God Helmet' he can reproduce 'spiritual' experiences in his subjects – unless, famously, that subject is Richard Dawkins. Anthropologist Ed Dutton thinks that correlation of temporal lobe activity with creativity might even account for the extremely high rates of Christian conversion to be found in Britain's elite universities (pp40-43). And it's worth noting that Jenny Randles, in her multi-part series "Life with the Aliens" (**FT265–269**) reported similarly suggestive correlations between psychic experience, alien contacts and altered states of consciousness in her interviewees.

So, perhaps we don't need visitors from outer space to explain the miracles and visions enumerated in the Bible – in fact, both gods and spacemen can be traced to the cognitive architecture of our own brains…

Or is the TLE theory just too good to be true? Charles Foster, in his fascinating talk entitled 'Wired for God' at the 2010 UnConvention, suggested that such neurological explanations run the risk of mistaking correlation for causation… but that's a story for another issue.

Happy Christmas!

DAVID SUTTON

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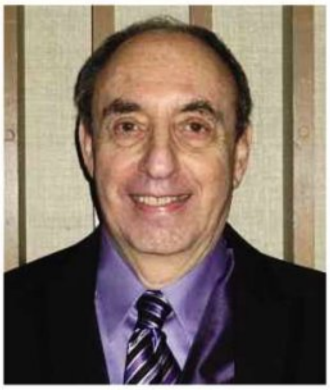
New evidence of psi power

A Cornell psychologist has made headlines with a paper suggesting that precognition is possible

Academic parapsychological research rarely garners coverage in the mainstream press, but a paper by Professor Daryl J Bem (right) of Cornell University has managed to cause something of a stir outside the usual circles. Perhaps that's because its author, unlike his mostly cautious and often actively sceptical academic peers, claims to have produced results suggesting that humans are capable of such feats as precognition and premonition.

Prof. Bem of Cornell University, New York State, carried out a series of nine different experiments involving over 1,000 volunteer students, and has published the results in a paper entitled "Feeling the Future: Experimental Evidence for Anomalous Retroactive Influences on Cognition and Affect", which will appear in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

Bem, a self-described maverick, started out as a physicist but switched fields in the 1960s, becoming a social psychologist. He has held senior posts at Cornell, Stanford and Harvard, and has published widely on self-perception, personality theory and sexual orientation. He also has a longstanding interest in psi, and this paper is the culmination of eight years of research.



Above-chance results were found in eight experiments

Bem defines psi as "anomalous processes of information or energy transfer that are currently unexplained in terms of known physical or biological mechanisms", and chose to study "*precognition* (conscious cognitive awareness) and *premonition* (affective apprehension) of a future event that could not otherwise be anticipated through any known inferential process". His methodology was simple, testing for "anomalous retroactive influence of some future event on an individual's current responses" by "time reversing" well-established psychological effects "so that the individual's responses are obtained before the putatively causal stimulus events occur".

One experiment involved the students being shown a long list of words and being asked to remember as many as possible. They were then asked to type a selection of words randomly selected by computer from the original list. In an apparently striking example of causality seemingly working in reverse, the students proved significantly better at recalling words they would later type.

In another experiment, devised to test precognition, Bem provided his volunteers with the following instructions: "This is an experiment that tests for ESP. It takes about 20 minutes and is run completely by computer. First you will answer a couple of brief questions. Then, on each trial of the experiment, pictures of two curtains will appear on the screen side by side. One of them has a picture behind it; the other has a blank wall behind it. Your task is to click on the curtain that you feel has the picture behind it. The curtain will then open, permitting you to see if you selected the correct curtain. There will be 36 trials in all. Several of the pictures contain explicit erotic images (e.g., couples engaged in nonviolent but explicit consensual sexual acts). If you object to seeing such images, you should not participate in this experiment."

Which curtain covered an image was selected randomly by computer, which should have given subjects a 50 per cent chance of correctly locating the image. The results were interesting, to say the least, with subjects achieving an overall hit-rate of 53.1 per cent for the pornographic pictures; while this may not sound all that impressive, statistically speaking it is significantly above chance. Their hit-rate on the neutral, non-erotic pictures was 49.8 per cent. Similar above-chance results were found in eight of the nine experiments, and across all nine an average 'affect size' of 0.22 was obtained.

Bem's hope is that his results will be taken seriously in academia. Certainly, his tests both build upon well-known experimental paradigms and take care to minimise the contact between experimenter and subject – even the data collection is an automated process. The paper passed the peer-review process, with Charles Judd, who oversaw it for the *JPSP*, commenting that some of the journal's "most trusted reviewers" were involved. Even psi-sceptic Joachim Kreuger of Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, was uncharacteristically impressed. "My personal view is that this is ridiculous and can't be true," he wrote. "Going after the methodology and the experimental design is the first line of attack. But frankly, I didn't see anything. Everything seemed to be in good order." He also found Bem's method of using time-reversed versions of established psychological phenomena "a stroke of genius", providing psychologists with tests that could be easily evaluated, and perhaps more importantly, replicated elsewhere.

Such replicability was one of Bem's main aims in constructing the experiments, and 'replication packs' are available online for others to use. We have no doubt that sceptical (para)psychologists everywhere will soon be running their own tests in the hope of demonstrating that Bem's results – like those of most psi experiments, historically – prove non-replicable or methodologically flawed. Prof. Richard Wiseman, a psychologist from the University of Hertfordshire known for debunking psi claims, blogged that he'd already found a serious potential problem in the way the data was collected.

Daryl J Bem: "Feeling the Future: Experimental Evidence for Anomalous Retroactive Influences on Cognition and Affect", available online as a pdf at: www.dbem.ws/FeelingFuture.pdf; www.hplusmagazine.com, 4 Nov; New Scientist, 11 Nov; Wired, 15 Nov; D.Telegraph, 18 Nov 2010.

EXORCISM LESSONS

Catholic Church trains American priests to fight possession

PAGE 9

MYSTERY OFFICALS

New cases see return of the bogus social worker panic

PAGES 10–11

PHONE ON SILENT

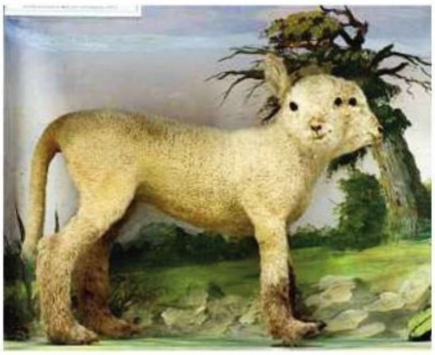
Mobile-using time-traveller spotted in 1928 film footage

PAGE 24

Quirky collection

The third exhibition in the labyrinthine Museum of Everything is a must-see for any fortean coming to London before Christmas. It is based on the circus curios and fairground ephemera accumulated over a lifetime by the celebrated pop artist Sir Peter Blake, creator of the Sergeant Pepper album cover. First up are the tiny boots of the famous 19th-century midget Tom Thumb, and a corridor lined with photos of human prodigies. Past an electric crystal-gazer you come to artworks by Cheeta, the chimp from the Tarzan films. There are Punch and Judy dolls, miniature fairground carousels, giant fairground paintings, a shell grotto, distorting mirrors, Victorian Valentine cards, and embroideries of pin-up girls.

However, the star attraction has to be the whimsical taxidermy dioramas created by that Victorian genius, Walter Potter, reassembled from various private owners after the Potter Museum was auctioned off at Jamaica Inn in Cornwall seven years ago [**FT177:4–6**]. Some of these – including "The House That Jack Built" and "The Babes in the Wood" – were bought by Blake himself, others by Harry Hill and David Bailey. (The Gang of Fort couldn't afford any dioramas, but managed to acquire some Potter creations: two stoats, a red squirrel, and a polecat-ferret hybrid.)



MUSEUM OF EVERYTHING

It was good to see again "Who Killed Cock Robin?" Potter's original diorama of 98 British birds, mounted in great detail, down to the tears of sorrow in the birds' eyes, and the owl digging a grave. This was wildly popular from its first exhibition in 1861. In the heyday of 19th-century "scientific" taxidermy, Potter revived the fantastical and surreal aspect of the Renaissance cabinets of curiosity. There's a two-headed lamb, a three-legged piglet, a three-legged duck, a four-winged chicken, and various canine midgets. Other exhibits include "The Upper Ten", with squirrels in a gentlemen's club puffing on cigars, and "A Friend In Need", which has two rats releasing a third rat from a box trap. The eight vitrines containing boxing squirrels are not the work of Potter, but are great fun all the same. In fact, the whole show is hugely entertaining and might be your last chance to see such a wide range of Potter's bizarre confections.

Until Christmas Eve, Museum of Everything, behind Chalk Farm Library, Sharpleshall St, London NW1. Wed to Sun 10.30 to 6.30pm, free. www.museumofeverything.com.

EXTRA! EXTRA! FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Hairless aliens told they may be denied entry visas for China

Irish Times, 12 June 2010.

Guide will help farmers with wind

(Bristol) Eve. Post, 23 June 2010.

Police to turn a blind eye to smoking pot

Metro, 27 Aug 2009.

Haddock to speak at UKIP meeting

North Devon Journal, 22 Oct 2009.

Astronauts told to hire taxis to get into space

D.Telegraph, 3 Feb 2010.

Woman 'had row with husband after he died'

Irish Examiner, 8 July 2010.

The meat's off: flesh-eating robots turn vegetarian

Guardian, 21 July 2009.

You cannot see the doctor, you're dead

Metro, 17 July 2010.

Dead woman caught in vortex of poverty, drugs

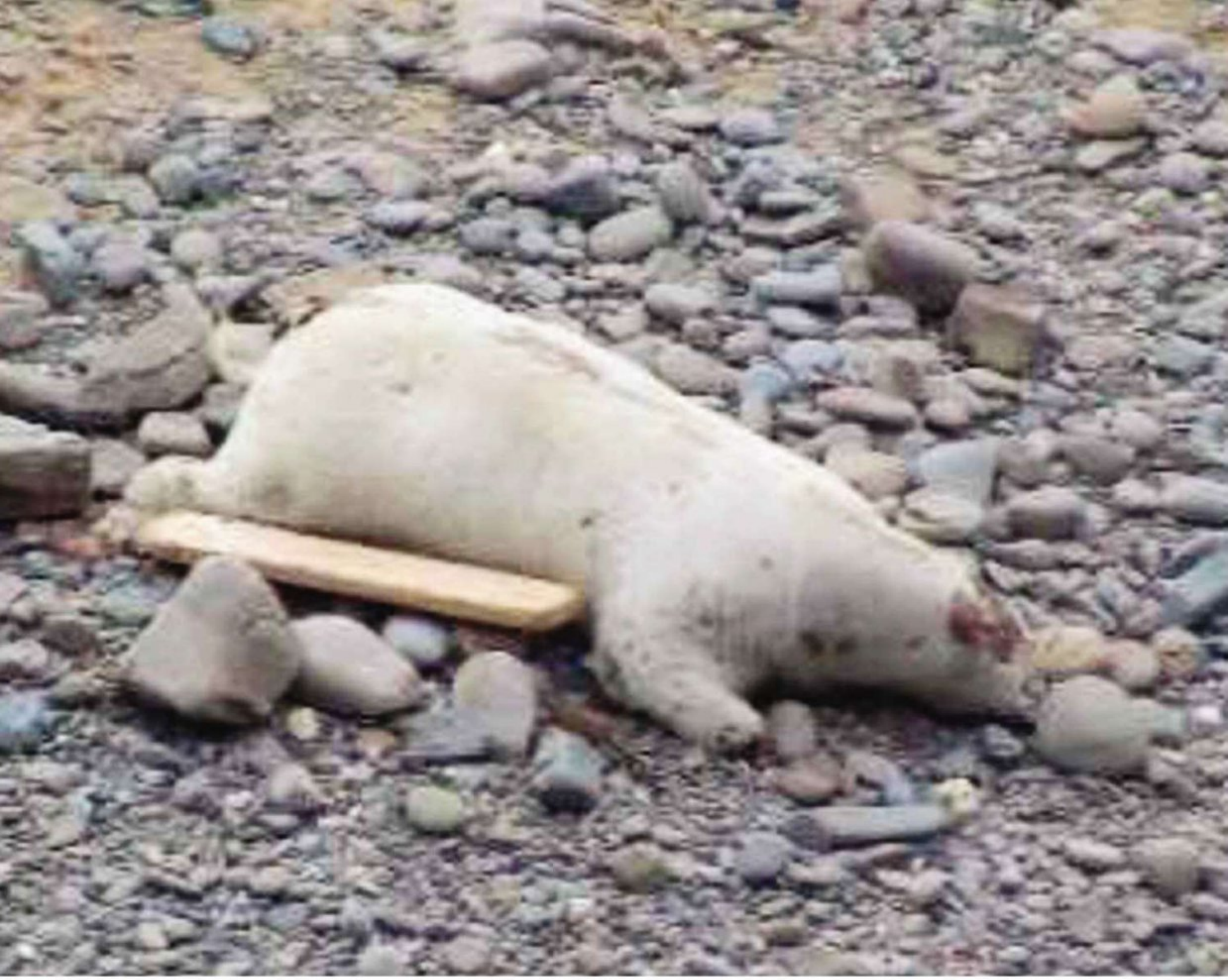
(Minneapolis) Star-Tribune, 5 Dec 2008.

Bugs in health check

North Devon Gazette, 21 Oct 2009.

Inside the empty world of Ireland's zombie hotels

Irish Times, 8 Feb 2010.



POLAR BEAR IN CORNWALL?

"A walker in Cornwall has caught an extraordinary sight on camera. A polar bear has washed up on a beach near Bude," excited television presenter Naomi Lloyd informed viewers of ITV's West Country breakfast bulletin at 7.55am on 20 September. "The bear comes from the Arctic Circle and an investigation is under way as to how it could have ended up there."

Alas for Miss Lloyd, the tale of the Cornish polar bear turned out to be several thousand miles wide of the mark. Closer inspection revealed that the polar bear was, in fact, a cow, bleached white by seawater (above). ITV dropped the item from later bulletins, but insisted that it was an easy mistake. "The animal caused quite a stir in Bude," said a spokesman. "Several people has seen the animal from a cliff top and thought it was a polar bear. Its size and colour and its lying position on the beach did make it look like a polar bear and we had several calls. But on closer inspection we discovered it was a cow. The tide was very strong and it did bring several dead animals in along that stretch of coast." He conceded that the mistake was "a bit embarrassing".

This was not the first time that something unusual washed up on the beach at Bude. In 2008, seven suitcase-sized packages of cocaine were found, part of a £2.5 million haul washed up along the coast. Earlier this year, the RSPB pulled off an April Fool's joke by claiming that a polar bear had been washed up – still alive – on the Isle of Mull.

D.Telegraph, 21 Sept 2010.

PHOTOS: SWNS

YOGA BEAR

A female brown bear called Santra (facing page) delighted visitors to Ahtari Zoo in Finland with a 15-minute limber-up after waking from a nap. First she stretched her legs separately, pulling each upwards with a paw and holding the position for about two minutes.

"It was exactly the same as when you see people do yoga – easy, slow, focused, and calm," said Meta Penca, 29, a web programmer from Slovenia, who caught the workout on camera. "She looked really into it, a really straight face, no looking around, just very serious and calm. She looked like she didn't notice us at all. She had a little rest and then did it all over again."

D.Mail, Metro, Sun, 16 Sept 2010.

PHOTOS: BNPS / META PENCA

SIDELINES...

WILDMAN HUNT

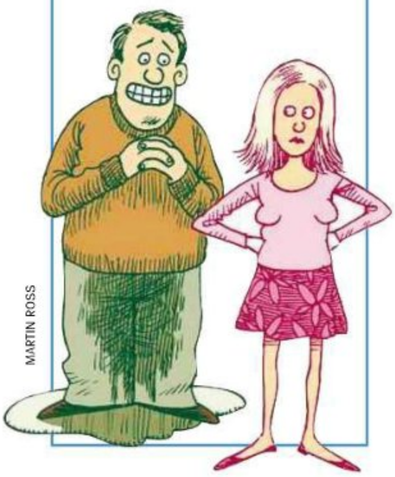
A group of Chinese scientists and explorers is looking for international help to mount a new search for the Yeren or Wildman, said to stalk the forested mountains of Hubei province. More than 400 people have claimed sightings of the creature, which is allegedly about 2m (6ft 7in) tall and covered in grey, red or black hair. The team will use camera traps and believe they have an 80 per cent chance of success. *[R] 9 Oct 2010.*

WINNIPEG MIRACLE

Pilgrims are flocking to a Catholic church in Winnipeg, Manitoba, following claims that a steel cross inside the building is "weeping". Mary Jane Kalenchuk, caretaker of the tomb of Bishop Blessed Vasae at St Joseph's Ukrainian Church, said an oily substance began oozing from the cross in September. *[CNN] 15 Oct 2010.*

NUMBER ONE FAN

A man who was too shy to chat up his neighbour peed in her garden for nearly 18 months, hoping she would be attracted to his scent. Herbert Pfarrhofer, 49, of Beckum in Germany, became smitten with Heike Brunner, 32, after his wife left him. He urinated hundreds of times on her flowers, garage, shed, garden tools and furniture. She complained to police about the smell, believing it was a neighbour's dog, and they caught Pfarrhofer in the act. *Sun, 22 July 2010.*



MARTIN ROSS

Bell, book and candle

Recruits sought for the fight against demonic possession

GETTY IMAGES / AFP / ALBERTO PIZZOLI

EXORCISTS NEEDED

Wanted: a few good men to cast out devils. Overwhelmed with requests for exorcists, US Roman Catholic bishops held a special training workshop in Baltimore on 12–13 November to teach clerics the esoteric rite, following a similar programme in Rome in 2005 (right). The Church signed up 56 bishops and 66 priests, seeking to boost the small group of just five or six American exorcists currently on its books. Despite strong interest in the training, scepticism about the rite persists within the Church and organisers of the event were keenly aware of the ridicule that can accompany discussion of the subject. Exorcists in US dioceses keep a very low profile. In 1999, the church updated the rite, cautioning that: "All must be done to avoid the perception that exorcism is magic or superstition".

Bishop Thomas J Paprocki of Springfield, Illinois, said: "There's this small group of priests who say they get requests from all over the continental US. Actually, each diocese should have its own exorcist." He didn't say why there was increased demand for exorcisms, which he noted were rarely performed. Neal Lozano, a Catholic writer and author of the book *Unbound: A Practical Guide to Deliverance*, said he knows an exorcist who receives about 400 inquiries a year, but determines that out of that number, only two or three of the cases require an exorcism. One probable factor in the increased demand is the influx of Catholic immigrants from Africa and South and Central America who accept the reality of demonic possession.

Church law stipulates that only properly trained priests can perform the rite – and then only with the permission of their bishops after a thorough evaluation, including consulting with physicians or psychiatrists to rule out any psychological or physical illness behind the person's behaviour. Possible signs of demonic possession include scratching, cutting, biting of the skin; profound displays of strength; speaking in a language the possessed person doesn't know; and a strong or violent reaction to holy water. *[R, AP] 12 Nov; Times, 15 Nov 2010.*

MASS POSSESSION

Panic broke out at the Moruga Composite School in the Caribbean state of Trinidad and Tobago on 10 November, as 17 female students began rolling on the ground, hissing and blabbering in a strange tongue, after suffering bouts of nausea and headaches. The trouble started during the lunch hour in the Form One block and quickly spread to other areas. Form Five student Kern Mollineau, who attends the Lighthouse Tabernacle Church, said he became worried when the girls' eyes began rolling up in their heads and they began thumping the ground. With the assistance of several other students and teachers, those affected were taken to the multi-purpose hall where some of them became semi-comatose.

"One girl was blabbering as if in a strange language," said Mollineau. "I couldn't understand what she was saying. It sounded like 'shebbaberbebeb shhhhee.' The girls were unusually strong. We had to hold them down so that they didn't hurt themselves. I got kicked in my face when one of them started beating up on the floor. Many of them had bruises."

Roman Catholic priests and pastors of other churches were called in and began showering the children with holy water and prayers. Six ambulances arrived, accompanied by police teams and fire officers. Two of the students tried to throw themselves off a railing and had to be physically restrained, triggering fears of a possible demonic attack. Mollineau claimed he actually communicated with a devil that had possessed a girl. "I asked the devil what he wanted with the girls and the voice said he wanted a life. He kept saying to send the girls in the toilet and to leave them alone."

Fire Officer Ramdeo Boodoo said tests had found nothing in the environment to trigger fainting spells, nausea and headaches. A teacher, who requested anonymity, said that two weeks earlier an Orisha woman came to the school and had a dispute with a member of staff and threatened to deal with the school administration. Had she bewitched the students? Another teacher said the school was built on a burial site, but neighbouring residents denied this. The 17 affected students were taken to a local health facility while the others were sent home at 2pm. *(Trinidad) Guardian, 11 Nov 2010.*

- Teachers of 10 teenager who collapsed one after another at a rural Cambodian school blamed the mysterious ailment on angry spirits. The girls, aged between 14 and 18, were treated in hospital after fainting. Ruos Lim Chhee, head of the high school in Pnov, said doctors were at a loss to explain the illness. All the girls were found to be healthy, with no sign of food poisoning. *Canberra Times, 25 Oct 2010.* For other recent outbreaks of mass psychogenic illness, see **FT266:24–25**.

Squawk of the town...

Parrots are making the news from Coventry to Colombia

ABOVE: This squirrel monkey has befriended a pair of blue and gold macaws at a rural hotel in San Agustin, Colombia, and is seen here hitching a ride to avoid the 26ft (8m) climb to the top of a tree in the garden.

SOLENTNEWS.CO.UK / ALEJANDRO JARAMILLO

When a gang of burglars planned a raid on a pet shop, they reckoned without a young sun conure parrot named Jack. When they swooped in the early hours of 15 September, the feathers flew and it was their blood left on the walls. After ripping out the burglar alarm, they spotted 11-month-old Jack in his cage and rashly tried to make off with him. They got pecked and scratched, leaving their DNA on pieces of torn clothing. Police found a trail of blood and feathers leading to the back door.

Caroline Hobday, 49, (below, with Jack) who runs Hobday's Pet Shop in Coventry with her husband Andrew, 52, said: "We couldn't believe it when we got into work in the morning. There was blood all over the shop and Jack was perched on top of his cage squawking like mad. All the evidence looks like he scared the thieves away and spent the rest of the night patrolling and protecting the other animals like a guard dog. Jack is a feisty young bird and is fiercely protective of the other birds in the shop. We often let him fly around for exercise so he knows his way around. We're very proud of him. Without his actions we would have lost thousands of pounds more in animals. He must have given the thieves a hell of a nip because his beak is like a razor and his talons very sharp." Despite Jack's best efforts, the thieves made off with three corn snakes worth £300 and a £250 Rosella parrot, and also killed some fish. *Metro, D.Mail, D.Mirror, 16 Sept 2010.*

SWNS

A parrot was being held by police in Colombia in the hope that it would squawk on its drug-trafficking owners. The bird said (in Spanish): "Run, run or the cat will get you" when it spotted police officers, tipping off the gang who fled their Barranquilla warehouse containing £100,000 worth of cocaine. "Parrots like to talk and we're good listeners," said one officer. *Metro, 22 Sept 2010.*

Rachel Harrison began to get suspicious of her boyfriend Andy Thomson when her pet parrot Harvey started screeching "Oh Claire, oh Claire!" as she cuddled up to Andy on the sofa. Then the six-year-old African grey blurted out: "I love you Claire!" Shop assistant Rachel, 25, knew there was a girl at Andy's work called Claire.

At first Andy claimed the bird must have picked up the phrase from the TV; but then Rachel rang insurance worker Andy, 26, at the office and was told he's nipped out for lunch – with Claire. "I drove home and saw Andy come out with Claire, who kissed him," said Rachel. "They must have done it on the couch in front of Harvey. Andy would have been too scared to go upstairs as he knows I make the bed in a certain way. Harvey told me everything I needed to know."

That night Rachel confronted Andy who admitted to the six-month fling at their Oldham home. She sent him packing – and gave Harvey away, because he kept screeching Claire's name. *News of the World, 12 Sept 2010.* For other parrot adventures, see **FT133:13, 145:26, 173:11, 177:14, 207:20, 209:11, 251:10.**

SIDELINES...

PENGUIN DISASTER

About 500 dead penguins were washed up on three Brazilian beaches in 10 days last July. Most were Magellan penguins migrating north in search of food and warmer waters. Autopsies revealed empty stomachs, indicating the birds had probably starved to death. Scientists were investigating whether strong currents and colder than normal waters had hurt the fish populations that make up their diet, or whether human activity had played a role. (The average annual death toll is only about 10.) *[AP] 22 July 2010.*

GREEN MISCHIEF

A man dressed as a leprechaun, jumping out from behind cars in a Boulder, Colorado, supermarket parking lot, was reported to the police on 30 June. He was pretending to shoot at people with his fingers and may have made obscene gestures. No one matching his description could be found. *Daily Camera (Boulder, CO), 30 June 2010.*

THAMES PIRANHA

Richard Salmon, 38, fishing for chub in the Thames at Marlow, Buckinghamshire, on 27 August, opposite the famous Compleat Angler hotel, caught a 4in (10cm) piranha. A native of South America, the piranha is fabled as the world's most fearsome freshwater fish. The previous June, another one was hooked in a pond near Folkestone, Kent. *Sun, 28 Aug 2010.*

MARTIN ROSS

SIDELINES...

VIRGIN BIRTH

Genetic tests have shown that two five-year-old pups of a captive white-spotted bamboo shark (*Chiloscyllium plagiosum*) are the result of parthenogenesis. It's the first known case of such shark offspring surviving long term (in two earlier instances, the pups died within days). *Journal of Heredity, v.101, pp374–7, July 2010.*

RECORD WASP NEST

Britain's biggest wasp nest was discovered in the loft of a pub in Southampton, Hampshire. It measured 6ft (1.8m) by 5ft (1.5m) and contained about half a million insects. A pest controller killed the wasps but left the nest to disintegrate. It was 15 times bigger than the UK average. A nest found on a farm in New Zealand in 1963, measuring 12ft (3.6m) by 5ft 9in (1.5m), is thought to hold the world record. *Mail online, 2 Aug 2010.*

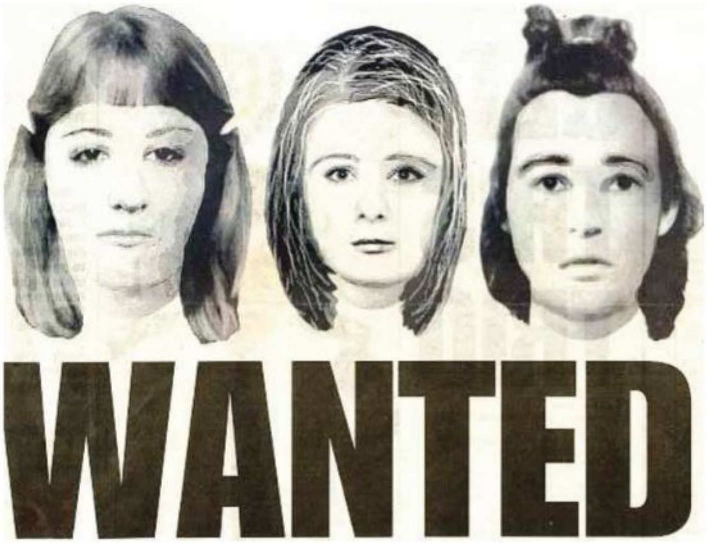
LIGHT LUNCH

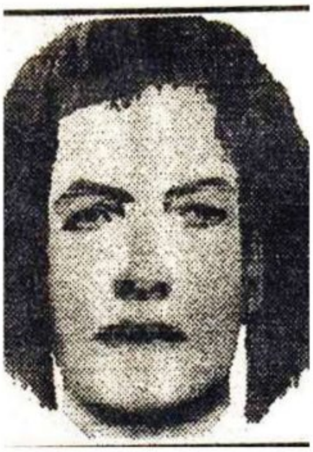
A Chinese man called Wang Jun, 52, is addicted to glass light-bulbs. He has munched his way through more than 1,000 since the age of 12, usually eating about 25 a month. "I used to eat them in secret," he said, "but then my wife caught me and a short while later we separated." *MX News (Sydney), 26 July 2010.*

MARTIN ROSS

BOGUS SOCIAL WORKERS

PARENTS UPSET BY NOSEY 'OFFICIALS'

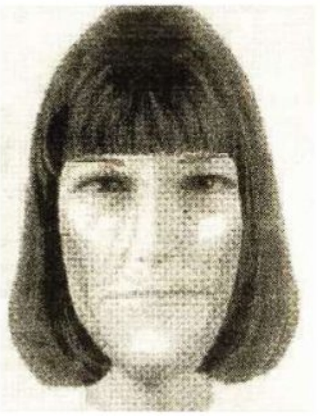




THIS PAGE AND FACING: Examples of police artists' rendering of the phantom officials' appearance.

Last summer, Charlotte Osborne, 25, had an unnerving encounter at her home in Haslemere Road, Southsea, Hampshire. "My son [Riley, aged two] was having a tantrum and refusing to go to bed," she said. It was 7.10pm on 30 August. "I heard a really loud knock on the door. I opened it and there was a man there who said he was from social services and there was something wrong with my son because he was crying. He said if he showed me ID would I let him in so he could check on the baby. Then I saw a woman looking at me. I tried to argue and eventually told him he had to leave. I was frightened the police were going to come round and take my son away. I was crying my eyes out. I called the police and an officer came round within an hour. He said he believed that they were opportunist burglars who may have been watching me. I was so shaken up I didn't go out for two days. I just want to warn other people."

The BSW (bogus social worker) was in his late 40s or 50s, and 5ft 10in (1.78m) tall. He had short grey hair and wore dark trousers and a striped white shirt. The woman was well built, about 5ft 4in (1.63m), with short brown hair and wearing a bright pink top. *The News (Portsmouth), 10 Sept 2010.*

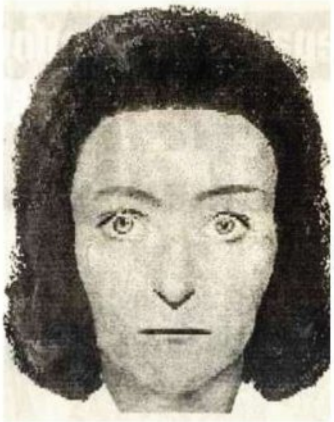


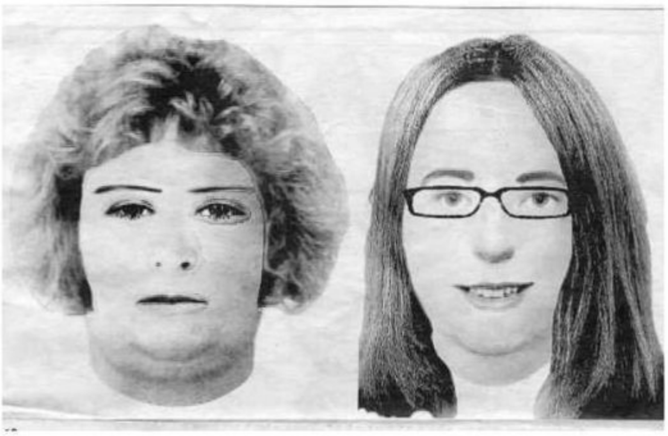
"The man said something was wrong with my son, as he was crying"

The motive for such a visit is unlikely to be anything as straightforward as opportunist burglary. It's over a decade since *Fortean Times* did a round-up of 'phantom' or bogus social workers attempting to examine or abduct children. The first reports of BSWs, as far as *FT* is aware, were in January 1990, culminating in a national BSW panic the following spring, when 23 separate police forces took part in "Operation Childcare". Countess thousands of man-hours were expended as the authorities tried to track down the perpetrators, resulting in a grand total of no arrests. Eventually, the police concluded they were dealing with a social panic, and admitted they were treating only 18 of more than 250 reported incidents as "significant" [**FT57:43–45**].

The panic flared up repeatedly in the subsequent six years [**FT61:36, 66:48–49, 77:36–38, 87:18, 98:14–15**], after which reports appeared to dwindle, judging by the clippings received at Fortean Towers. Such incidents are of interest to forteans because of the often odd behaviour of the BSWs and the fact that they are never apprehended, leading to scepticism about their very existence. Some anomalists have even seen parallels with the sinister MIBs (Men In Black) who warn off UFO witnesses.

To give a flavour of how eerie a BSW encounter can be, here is one from seven years ago. Erica Grange, 28, lived in Berwick Hill, Northumberland, with her partner Mark Barnes, and their three children, Emily (eight), Holly (five) and Jack (one). One day in September 2003, she was at home looking after her baby son when there was a knock at the





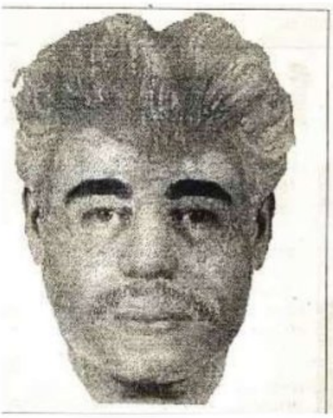
door. "There was a very smartly dressed tall man and plumpish woman," said Ms Grange. "They said they'd come from the social services department and I started to shake, wondering what they wanted. They said they'd had a report I'd been abusing my children and needed to come in and look around. I said no because my partner wasn't in and I asked them to show me their ID. Their cards said Social Services Department and had no name or signatures and I was a bit wary. They knew that I had a little boy with me and asked, my two daughters are at school, aren't they? I don't know how they knew that, it was spooky, like they'd been watching. I said if they wanted to come in they needed to have a warrant and to come with the police."

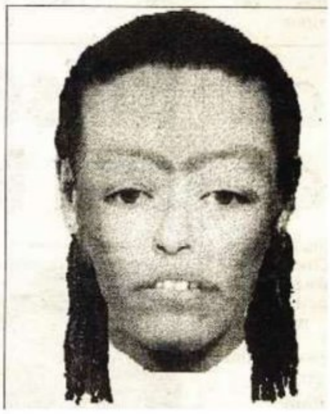
The man was in his late 30s, about 6ft (1.8m) tall with short dark hair, wearing a dark grey suit. The woman was in her 40s, about 5ft (1.5m) tall, with mousy hair in a clip, and wearing a dark navy skirt suit. After the couple left, Ms Grange phoned social services and was told the department had no record of the family. "I've phoned the kids' school and explained if anyone does try to take my children out of school don't let them," she said. *Middlesbrough Eve. Gazette, 10 Sept 2003.*

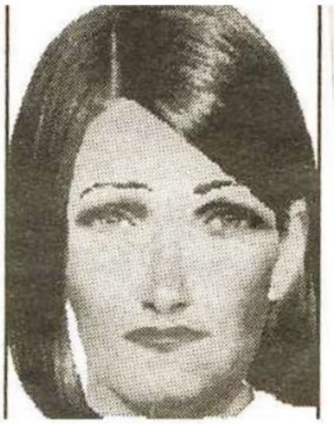
BSW visits occur all over the UK and Ireland, and *Fortean Times* has received the occasional report of some in other countries, for instance in Miami, Florida, in 2002 and Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 2003. According to the news reports received, they have occurred in the following UK and Irish locations in the last decade:

2000: Ellesmere Port, Cheshire (Jan); Kirton-in-Lindsey, Humberside (Feb); Lincoln (Mar); Stockport, Gtr Manchester (April); Chelmsford, Essex (April); Bradford (May); Beccles, Suffolk (June); Kenningford, Oxfordshire (Oct). **2001:** Nottingham (Feb); Ripley, Derbyshire (Mar); Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire (Mar); Great Finborough, Suffolk (April); Inverness (Oct). **2002:** Standish, Lincolnshire (Jan); Caerphilly, South Wales (Feb); Berinsfield, Oxfordshire (Oct). **2003:** Askeaton, Co. Limerick (June); Leeds (Nov). **2005:** Melton Constable, Norfolk (Feb); Stockton, Boosbeck, Grangetown and Hemlington, Teeside, (Feb). **2006:** Tidworth, Wiltshire (Jan); Wellington, Shropshire (May); Wick, Highland (May); Cookstown, Co. Tyrone (Aug). **2008:** Lydney, Forest of Dean (Jan).

Sources: ITV teletext, 5 Jan; Scunthorpe Eve. Telegraph, 1 Feb; Lincolnshire Echo, 4 Mar; Stockport Express, 26 April, 3 May; Yorkshire Post, 17 May; Eastern Daily Press, 12 June; Oxford Mail, 28 Oct 2000. Sun, 5 Mar; Stoke Sentinel, 15 Mar; Bury Free Press, 6 April; Sunday Mail (Scotland), 21 Oct 2001. Shevington (Lancs) Courier, 1 Feb; Western Mail, 15 Feb; Ananova, 9 Oct; Guardian, D.Mirror, 10 Oct 2002. Irish Times, 13 June; Yorkshire Eve. Post, 22 Nov 2003. Eastern Daily Press, 16 Feb; Middlesbrough Eve. Gazette, 1 Mar, 6+8 Sept 2005. Western Daily Press, 11 Feb; Sun, 12 May; Caithness Courier, 31 May; Independent on Sunday, 6 Aug 2006. Western Daily Press, 26 Jan 2008.







SIDELINES...

SECRET LAWS

Drivers protested after parking authorities in Copenhagen, the Danish capital, decided that many of its traffic laws were secret, in defiance of rulings that wardens must explain why they issued tickets. The wardens claimed that if drivers found out what rules they had broken they would lose respect for the laws and might try to work around them. *D.Telegraph, 7 Aug 2010.*

GRIEVING FOR PUSSY

A driver was arrested on the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido on 1 September after driving the wrong way down a highway for 55 miles (88km) and crashing through five police barricades. "I was sad that my pet cat died," said Tsutomu Mizumoto, 31. "I wanted to do something crazy." *Queensland Sunday Mail, 5 Sept 2010.*

PUSS IN BOOT

Police charged a 51-year-old motorist with animal cruelty after finding a live cat in his car boot, in a marinade of oil, red peppers and chilli. He told officers in Buffalo, New York state, that he was planning to cook the cat because the animal was bad-tempered. *Sunday Times, 15 Aug 2010.*

BUTTS KILLS BOOB

Kermit Butts was arrested over the shotgun killing of Samuel Boob in Potter Township, central Pennsylvania, in 2009. The victim's wife, Miranda Boob, 26, was also accused of taking part in the crime – she allegedly drove the killer to the murder scene. The hitman had the unfunny name of Ronald Heichel. *MX News (Sydney), 3 Sept 2010.*

HOLY WATER NEWS

For the first time in almost a century, the export of consecrated water from the site where Jesus is believed by some to have been baptised, now in Jordan, has resumed. The export of sacred water from the River Jordan came to a halt with the fall of the Ottoman Empire. *Queensland Times, 12 Aug 2010.*

SIDELINES...

CROSS WITH GOD

A man who said he torched a church to get revenge on God for the world's woes was jailed for 21 months in Munich, Germany. *D.Mirror, 30 Sept 2010.*

ARE YOU SERIOUS?

A man dressed as a clown, believed to be in his 50s, tried to hold up the Altura Credit Union in Riverside, California, but left empty-handed. He was wearing heavy pancake makeup, bright red lipstick, pink rouge on his cheeks, and a wig – and was carrying a black handbag. "I guess they didn't take the clown seriously," said a policeman. *Cairns (Queensland) Weekend Post, 21 Nov 2009.*

NO BRIGHT SPARK

American student Kyle Dubois, 18, who electrocuted himself after attaching electrical clamps to his nipples in a science class, is suing his teacher, Thomas Kelley, for not warning him it was dangerous. Dubois claims he suffered brain damage, but *FT* reckons he was a moron before the incident. *Dublin Herald, 1 Sept 2010.*

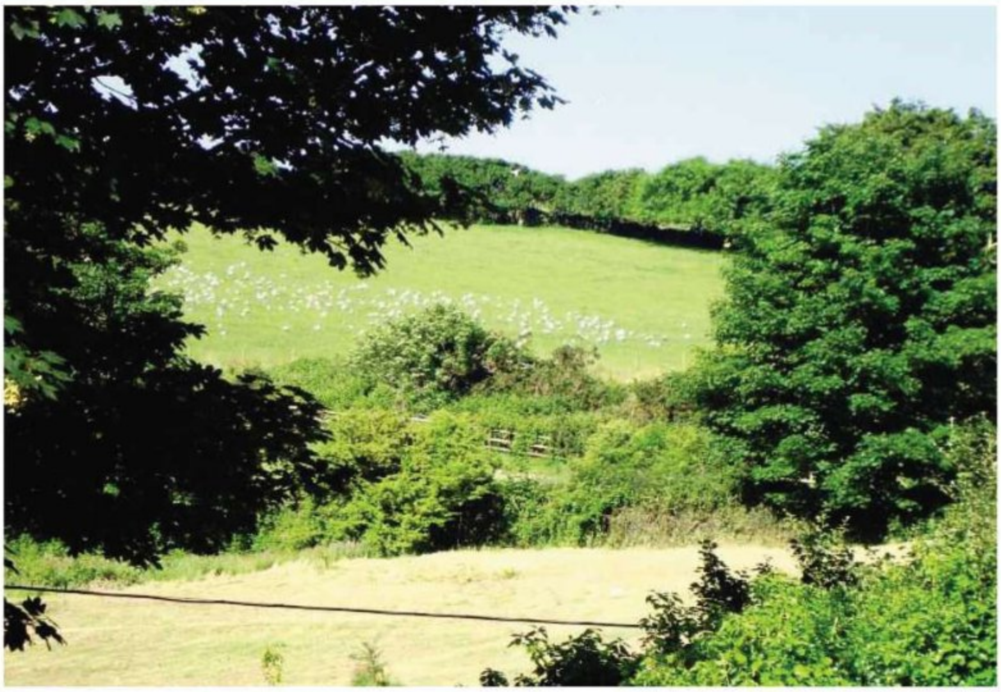
FLORAL COMBUSTION

A fire that did $20,000 in damage to Brian Duncan's house near Paragould, Arkansas, on 25 July "was caused by self-heating through decomposition of organic materials contained within a plastic flowerpot", an insurance investigator concluded. The flowerpot had contained dead flowers and potting soil that Duncan's wife had planted in the summer of 2009. *[AP] 1 Sept 2010.*

GOLFER SPARKS FIRE

A golfer at the Shady Canyon Golf Course in Irvine, California, landed a shot in the rough on 28 August. On his next swing, his club snagged a rock, causing a spark that started a 12-acre (5ha) blaze on densely wooded hillsides, eventually extinguished by 150 firefighters with helicopter support. No charges were filed. *[AP] 31 Aug 2010.*

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

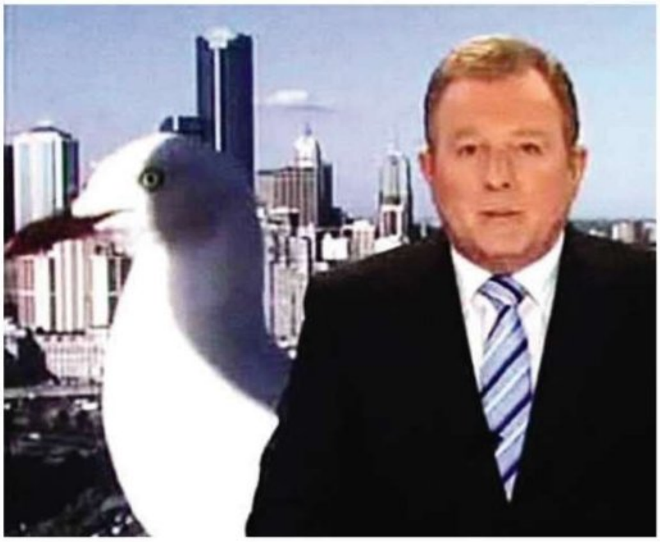


COURTESY PHILIP MILTON / WWW.TRIMSTONE.CO.UK

SEAGULL MYSTERY

The following enigmatic avian behaviour (above) was described by Philip Milton, owner of the Trimstone Manor Country Hotel & Tyme Restaurant, about two miles (3.2km) from the coast at Woolacombe in Devon. "Many months ago," he wrote to the *Western Morning News* (25 June 2010), "a large collection of seagulls decided to take a liking to one of the neighbouring farmers' fields and every night there is this quiet 'invasion' of graceful seagulls which come in and pitch and roost in the field. There is nothing special about the field – yes, water is nearby on the various ponds and within their 44 acres [18ha] but all they do is roost, preen and in the morning, without any fuss whatsoever, off they go, in dribs and drabs till they have gone and all that is left behind is the dappled field, littered by the evidence of their white feathers.

"So, why? They are not being fed, it is simply a grassy field and with no other features of note. What has attracted them to this field? They are so quiet (as opposed to the calamitous cacophony as is often associated with seagulls) and they leave no trace anywhere else as they arrive or go. They weren't here last year but nothing was any different and they arrive from different directions and disperse likewise." In November, Mr Milton told *FT*: "Curiously, one day the gulls just stopped coming and we haven't seen them since – it was as mysterious as their arrival and decision to use the field as a home!" Readers are invited to offer possible explanations.



CHANNEL NINE

IT'S BEHIND YOU!

As Peter Hitchener read the news on an Australian TV channel, a Godzilla-sized seagull strutted behind his head. The bird had walked in front of a camera positioned to capture a bird's eye view of Melbourne. Hitchener ignored the bird and carried on. He later said that studio cameramen were hiding behind their cameras to conceal their laughter. "It had the beadiest huge eyes you've ever seen in your life," he said. *Metro, Sun, 23 Oct 2009.*

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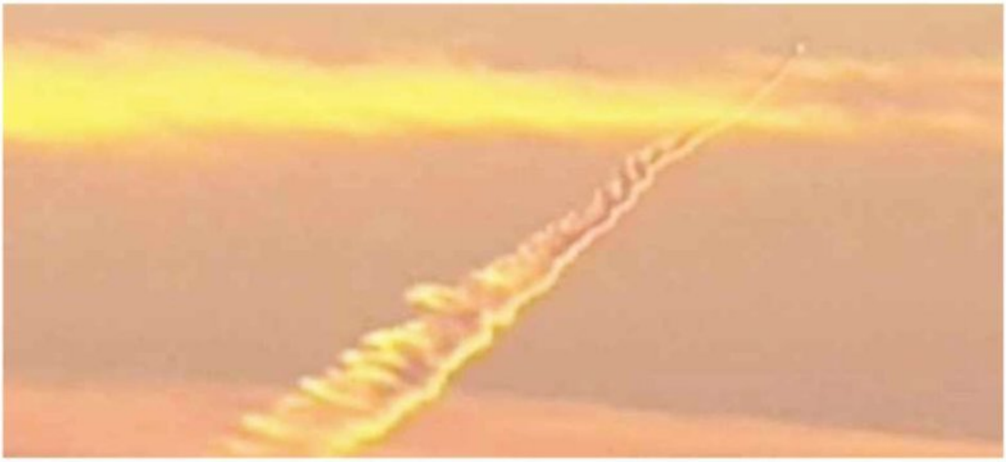
MATT PATTINSON

REACH FOR THE SKIES

DAVID HAMBLING discusses recent reports of what appeared to be a rocket launch off America's west coast. Theories abound, amidst the usual round of military denials.



PA PHOTO / AP / KCBS / KCAL

ABOVE: California's mysterious "missile trail" caused a media storm. **BELOW:** But all the author saw was a lovely sunset.

For once I was in the right place at the right time, and I was there to see the mysterious contrail off the Californian coast, which made headlines all over the world.

I was following the footsteps of gumshoe Philip Marlowe in Raymond Chandler's *Playback* by taking the Surfliner, a train that runs down the Pacific coast from Los Angeles to San Diego. The journey provides a fine view of the sunset over the ocean and on 8 November a television news helicopter for KCBS was watching too. They filmed a rather unusual contrail, one that is wide at the base and narrow at the top, appearing to rise vertically.[1] The immediate conclusion was that it was a missile launched from some miles offshore. This would not be unusual, as this stretch of water lies off Vandenberg Air Force Base and is often used for missile tests. However, no test was scheduled. Was this something secret – or a warning shot from the Chinese?

Some observers plotted the launch back to San Nicolas Island, used for USAF launches. Others thought it came from a submarine. Most agreed it was a ballistic missile, an alarming thing to have appearing off your coast without warning. When questioned about the launch, the Pentagon was unhelpful. "NORAD and USNORTHCOM are aware of the unexplained contrail reported off the coast of Southern California yesterday evening," said their statement. "At this time, we are unable to provide specific details, but we are working to determine the exact nature of this event. We can confirm that there is no indication of any threat to our nation and we will provide more information as it becomes available."

The immediate conclusion was that it was a missile launched from some miles offshore

DAVID HAMBLING

The response is reminiscent of official reports on UFO sightings: we don't know what it is, but it's nothing to worry about.

If the military were slow to comment, others were quick to fill the gap. Some said it was not a missile launch at all, just the contrail of an airliner seen from an unusual angle. When the aircraft is heading directly for the observer, the contrail may appear to travel vertically upwards from the horizon.

Among the other reasons for identifying it as an aircraft are the slow speed and the lack of an obvious burning exhaust plume. One commentator identified the aircraft in question as Flight AWE808 from Hawaii, passing over Los Angeles *en route* to Phoenix, Arizona.

However, some experts, including Bill Sweetman of *Aviation Week*, were less convinced by the aircraft explanation. The trail is thicker than its further end, which is a reversal of the usual pattern; whereas billowing out at the base is quite characteristic of a missile launch.

There are other anomalies too. Some observers claim to have heard the rumble of a missile launch. Both sides have their own interpretation of the glints of light in the exhaust trail: reflected sunlight, or definite evidence of combustion from a rocket exhaust?

Robert Ellsworth, a former US Deputy Secretary of Defence, speculated to CBS News that it was a show of force by the American military. "It could be a test-firing of an intercontinental ballistic missile from a submarine… to demonstrate, mainly to Asia, that we can do that." [2]

As the furore grew, the Pentagon spokesmen were driven to issue another statement. They said that they had not carried out any launches "scheduled or inadvertent" at the time and that no foreign missiles had been detected. In addition, the FAA didn't detect anything on radar, and hadn't received reports of unusual sightings from pilots in the area. Their spokesman mentioned the possibility of an optical illusion, but stopped short of saying that was definitely the explanation for it – which is surprising, since they must have the technology to superimpose the video on all known flight paths and show whether there was a match.

This gave the green light for continued speculation. Much of this focused on the possibility of a Chinese missile, or a cover-up of an accidental US launch. A report on CNN suggested that the missile was North Korean, from an "a Sang-O class sub… towing a missile-launching sea sled".[3] Firing a missile like this is technically possible, having been tested by Germany during World War II, but it would be out of character for the North Koreans, who have always loudly trumpeted their military capabilities, to carry out this kind of blatant-but-secret action using hitherto unseen hardware.

Meanwhile, those with an interest in UFOs have not been slow in suggesting that the contrail might have had unearthly origins.

What would Marlowe make of it? The case is right up his street, with suspicion on all sides and powerful, secretive interests at work. Fear of China is high up on the US agenda at the moment, and there are threats of cuts to the defence budget. He'd probably do some digging, find the holes in the witnesses' stories, and figure the whole thing out. Maybe he'd say the whole thing was a lot of hot air and ice particles. Or maybe he'd turn up a scam to get a few billion out of Uncle Sam with a phoney scare story. Or maybe he'd find something the military don't want to – or can't – explain.

At any rate, he would have noticed the contrail. Your seasoned reporter here didn't see anything unusual and took photos of the pretty sunset instead.

NOTES

1 http://tinyurl.com/349f644 (cbsnews.com).

2 http://tinyurl.com/23pjewm (cbsnews.com).

3 http://tinyurl.com/3a65oaj (ireport.cnn.com).

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MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE begins a two-part look at British ghosts associated with capital punishment.

GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE

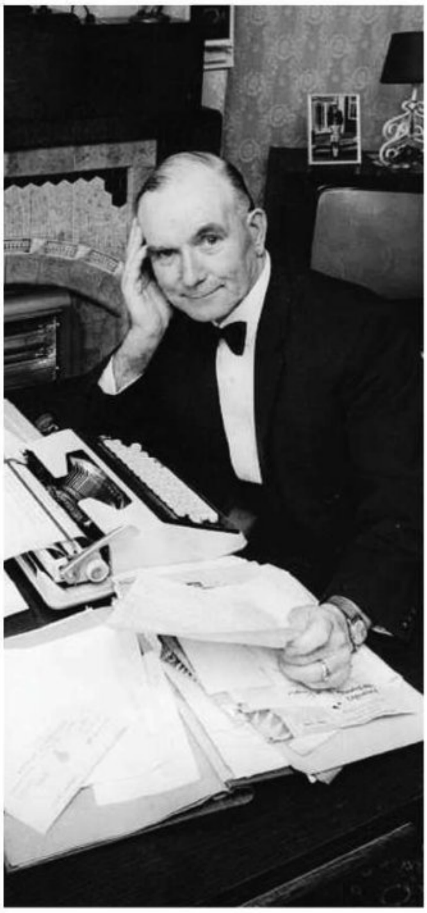
ABOVE LEFT: Ruth Ellis, hanged in 1956.
ABOVE RIGHT: Mrs Louisa Merrifield, hanged in 1953.
BELOW: Albert Pierrepoint despatched them both.

THEREBY HANGS A TALE...

The alleged shades of royals, nobles and more common felons put to death in centuries past have long been an established part of the British ghostly scene. Executed queens (particularly Anne Boleyn) and celebrated criminals such as Dick Turpin, who paid the ultimate price for their villainy, reputedly appear at numerous sites around the UK. A great number are said to walk at Christmas time, but it may surprise the reader that in many cases the evidence for these hauntings is at best shaky, and quite often non-existent. However, as GK Chesterton wrote in his *Autobiography* in 1936: "…it is the woodcutter with no axe to grind, except for woodcutting, who will say he saw a man hang on the gallows and afterwards hang around it as a ghost. It is all very well to say we ought not to believe in the ghost on an ignorant man's evidence. But we should hang the man on the gallows on the same man's evidence."

While capital punishment remained hugely controversial before and after its abolition in 1965, few ghost stories seem to have arisen from 20th-century executions. The official practice from 1868 onwards of only hanging criminals behind prison walls, away from popular gaze, undoubtedly reduced the stimuli provided for macabre fantasising by the spectacles of public executions and bodies left dangling from gibbets for years on end. (An obscure 19th-century work entitled 'Gyb Ghosts' is apparently devoted to such phenomena. See *Ghost Parade*, 1944, by Stuart Martin, also author of *The Hangman's Guests*). Nonetheless, as the 20th century's most active hangman, Albert Pierrepoint commented in his autobiography *Executioner Pierrepoint* (1974), a hanged man or woman "is a uniquely broken body". So it would not be surprising if some modern executions have left ghostly echoes. Perhaps inevitably, these include some of the more infamous cases, including several examples where Mr Pierrepoint applied his skills.

It's not surprising that some modern executions have left ghostly echoes



GETTY IMAGES / IAN TYAS

The willingness to make links between seemingly otherwise anonymous manifestations and a sensational murder case has recently been demonstrated with the suggestion that Ruth Ellis, the last woman to be hanged for murder in Britain, is haunting a pub and churchyard in Penn, Buckinghamshire. Ellis was executed in 1956 after shooting dead her lover David Blakely on Easter Sunday 1955, outside The Magdala pub in Hampstead, London.

The idea that there might be a connection with apparitions at Penn has been raised by the local *Bucks Free Press*, following an interview with ghost-hunter Eddie Brazil, who together with Paul Adams and Peter Underwood are authors of the *Borley Rectory Companion* (2009). The trio are now at work on a book about haunted churches, evocatively entitled *Shadows in the Nave*. Eddie Brazil has been investigating reports from the 1980s of the figure of a woman in white seen leaving Penn churchyard by the east gate, and walking down the narrow lane of Paul's Hill which runs by it. Across the road stands The Crown public house, which also has stories of being haunted by a woman in white.

Two associations between the area and Ruth Ellis have been found. Firstly, her victim David Blakely is buried in Penn churchyard, and enquiries revealed that in life the couple had often met and drunk together in The Crown pub. Personally, Eddie is cautious about any such connection between Ellis and the phantom lady, stating in an email to me: "What I was trying to point out to the chap from the paper was that, in many hauntings, if a site has a resident ghost who cannot be identified then local folklore will sometimes provide the identity. Because of Ruth's connection with Penn, people will readily associate her, or any other famous or infamous person, with the spectre."

Although there is no evidence to prove it is the ghost of Ellis, the *Bucks Free Press* nonetheless ran the headline: "Last hanged woman's ghost haunts Penn, author says".

As Eddie Brazil recognises, many reasons can be put forward for rejecting such a connection, not least that graveyards seldom seem haunted, certainly by anyone with a clear identity. Ruth Ellis herself lies buried at Amersham Churchyard, having originally been interred within Holloway Prison. However, if there is any validity in Carl Jung's idea that ghosts of women in white are archetypal personifications of outraged feminine feelings, then an identification with Ellis would be plausible in some quarters.

In contrast, her executioner Albert Pierrepoint did not share the view of Ellis as a woman uniquely wronged, seeing prejudice and double standards in the hysteria surrounding her death. He considered that the press and public were only concerned because Ellis was young and pretty, noting no outburst of popular concern occurred 10 months earlier when he hanged Styllou Christofi, a Cypriot grandmother who spoke no English. Coincidentally, Christofi, executed in December 1954, lived at South Hill Park in Hampstead, just a few doors from The Magdala, where David Blakely was shot four months later. *Bucks Free Press, 9 July 2010; Eddie Brazil pers. comm., 1 Nov 2010.*

Another female felon dispatched by Pierrepoint who has also been largely forgotten – though not by those who have seen her spectre – is Mrs Louisa Merrifield, "the Blackpool poisoner". She was hanged at Strangeways Prison, Manchester, on 18 September 1953 for the murder of a 79-year-old widow. Her ghost returns to the cell where she spent her last night on Earth in human form. The website of a Lancashire research group carries the interesting account of a former prison officer, Mr G Sutton, who states that he "like many others" has seen her. He described a shadowy figure in dark clothing no more than 5ft (1.5m) in height that drifted past him. It was visible for about five seconds, "creating a noticeable drop in temperature". The form moved to a cell door and vanished. The young prisoner inside the cell also apparently saw the figure and was terrified, asking Mr Sutton: "Who's that woman, boss? She just walked in before you pointed at me and vanished." Mr Sutton states the ghost was known as "old Mrs Merrifield" and sightings peaked during the 1980s. *http://tinyurl.com/32a4fvk (theghostwhisperers.co.uk).*

Next month, we'll look at some further examples of apparitions of the executed, as well as some phantom hangmen. For now, it may be noted during the season of goodwill that the British state never showed any sentimentality about hanging convicted murderers close to Christmas. Although executions did not occur on Christmas Day, they were certainly held in Christmas week and on Christmas Eve. Still, perhaps the old folklore belief (probably pre-Reformation in origin) that if you die on Christmas Eve you go straight to Heaven might be a comfort for the souls of those so condemned.

Merry Christmas everyone.

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

136. CONKERS

The myth

The traditional game of conkers has been banned from British schools for "health and safety" reasons.

The "truth"

HUNT EMERSON

In October 2004, the head of Cummersdale Primary School, Carlisle, made a schoolboy error: he imagined that journalists were capable of understanding satire. Fed up with filling in what he considered to be excessive forms when taking children on school trips, Shaun Halfpenny decided to stage a protest against the Health and Safety Executive's obsession, as he saw it, with red tape. He arranged for a group of his pupils to play conkers while wearing safety goggles, and invited the local press along to watch. Inevitably, by the time the story had reached the national media, the joke was being reported as fact – and has been ever since. In time, the myth evolved from the relatively subtle "goggles" original into the simpler variant of a total ban on conkers. Indeed, as late as 2009, the then Leader of the Opposition, David Cameron, was using the conkers ban as evidence of "health and safety gone mad". The HSE itself described the risk from playing conkers as "not worth bothering about", while in a brave but doomed attempt to counter the untruths, the Institute of Occupational Safety and Health has sponsored the World Conker Championships.

Sources

http://s.coop/independenths; http://s.coop/mail; http://s.coop/iosh.

Disclaimer

All discussion of matters such as this is complicated by ostension: it may well be that some schools *have* since banned conkers in response to false press reports. But can anyone find an instance that predates Mr Halfpenny's escapade?

Update

Yet another possible origin for the myth that we all need to drink eight glasses of water a day to avoid dehydration [**FT178:28**, **262:15**]. After World War II, GI brides waiting to sail to the US were taught at the 'School for Brides' in London that they would need the eight daily glasses to "make up for the lack of moisture in the American air". (Maureen Waller: *London 1945*, John Murray, 2005).

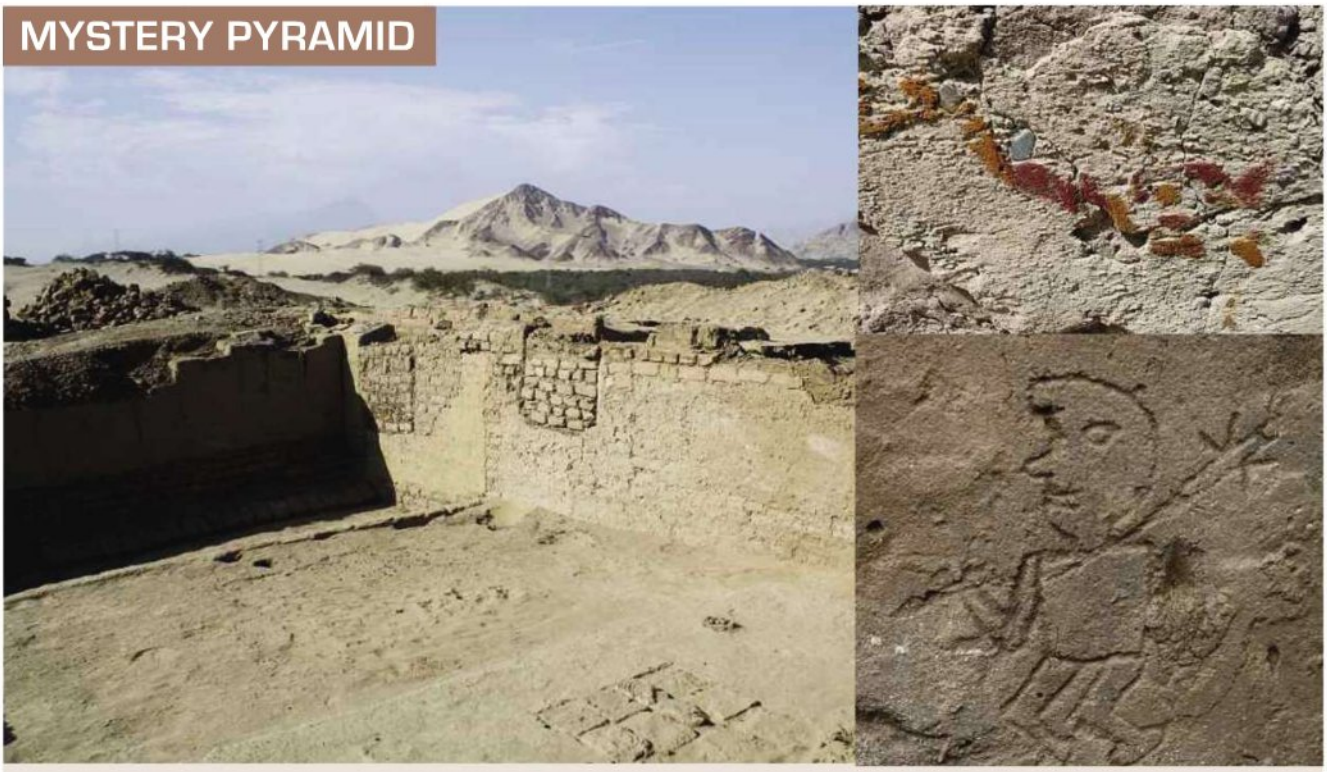
FOR MORE MYTHCONCEPTIONS, GO TO:
www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/mythbusters

MATT PATTINSON

ARCHÆOLOGY

Our archæological round-up is brought to you by **PAUL DEVEREUX**, a founding co-editor of the peer-review *Time and Mind: The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* (www.bergpublishers.com).

MYSTERY PYRAMID

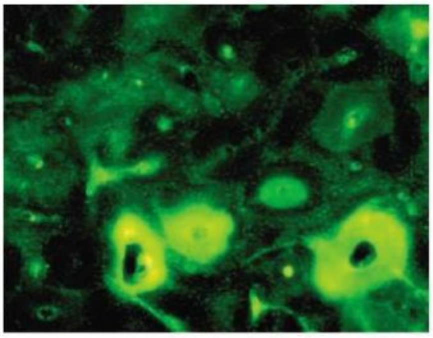


ALL PICS: EDWARD SWENSON

ABOVE: The Moche Culture mud-brick pyramid and platform at Huaca Colorado, Peru. **TOP:** Painted snake mural. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Carved figure of a Moche warrior.

An unusual mud-brick pyramid has been uncovered from the sands at Huaca Colorado, Peru. Pyramids of this type, belonging to the Moche Culture (AD c.100–800), are usually mortuary structures, but this pyramid has the remnants of residences on its flat summit. These buildings, containing patios and a kitchen, housed up to 25 seemingly high-status people. There are graffiti-like murals of a "smurf-like" Moche warrior, serpents, nature and social scenes. Evidence of feasts involving roasted llama, guinea pig, red peppers, fish and corn beer has been found, along with coca leaves. The pyramid doesn't seem to have been a religious or state structure, but simply built for this elite group.

The skeletons of three young women and the body parts of four other people were also uncovered; the girls seem to have been tied and ritually burned, presumably as sacrifices, though lack of trauma indicates that it wasn't the burning that killed them. The seven-storey pyramid had no defences, yet no warfare seems to have affected the place. Archæologists are unsure as to the nature of the people who lived atop the pyramid, but the finding of copper artefacts and smelting pits in and around the lower parts of the structure suggests they may have controlled metallurgical resources which accorded them special prestige. *Independent, 21 May; National Geographic Daily News, 21 Oct 2010.*



GEORGE ARMELAGOS

GOOD HEALTH!

According to a recent paper in the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, chemical analysis of the bones of ancient Nubians (inhabitants of what is today Sudan) has revealed large residues of antibiotics, specifically tetracycline. The scientists think this was a result of the Nubians consuming generous quantities of their grain-based beer, and the grain used to make the beer containing the soil bacteria *Streptomyces* (green specks seen on bone samples) which produce tetracycline. "We tend to associate drugs that cure diseases with modern medicine," says anthropologist George Armelagos, one of the researchers, "but it's becoming increasingly clear that this prehistoric population was using empirical evidence to develop therapeutic agents. I have no doubt that they knew what they were doing." *Mail Online, 6 Sept 2010.*

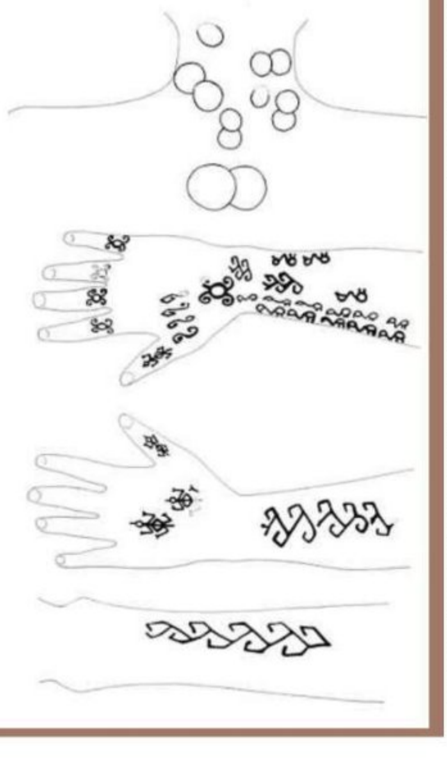
POCKET-SIZED ARCHÆOLOGY

If you want to fill in the long weeks between your monthly *FT* archæological news columns, you can now get an iPhone app to keep you updated and provide you with some remarkable features. Created by our friends at Stone Pages, the *ArchaeoNews* app is now available for a very modest charge. For more details go to: http://tinyurl.com/39yohda (pasthorizons.com).

POINTS OF INTEREST

Tattoos on a 1,000-year-old female mummy from Chiribaya Alta in southern Peru are being microscopically examined by an Austrian medical team. The mummy's markings, seemingly a mix of decorative and possibly therapeutic tattoos, are on her hands and neck and show birds, apes, and reptiles, as well as symbols (facing page). She has rings tattooed on her fingers with soot, and 12 overlapping circles on her neck mark areas of the body where today's Chinese acupuncture needles are inserted for therapeutic purposes. Burned herbs were used as part of the tattoo pigments and they could also have been intended for healing effect, the team suggests. *USA Today, 1 Oct 2010*.

Non-decorative tattoos have been found on ancient mummies around the world. For example, the Alpine frozen Bronze Age (even Neolithic) mummy, "Otzi", sported groups of lines next to his lumbar spine area, and on the right knee and both ankles, close to joints. X-rays showed bone degeneration in all these areas, and it has been controversially proposed that the tattoos were part of a pain-relieving treatment. In a fascinating Iron Age parallel, another "ice man" was found preserved in one of the frozen tombs at Pazyryk in the Siberian Altai Mountains. In addition to magnificent decorative tattoos, he had a vertical line of pinpoint tattoo punctures on each side of his lumbar spine and an arc of pinpoints on the right ankle. Is the Chinese acupuncture system we know a culmination of a somehow interconnected single line of knowledge stretching back through various cultures and thousands of years, or else could the principles of acupuncture have been discovered independently at different places at different times?



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CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

132. TO ANCIENTLY GO...

(This topic demands a Trekkian split infinitive. See further M Cary & EH Warmington: *The Ancient Explorers*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1963)

"Even if a man were to be an eye-witness, it was still difficult for him to scorn travellers' tales of marvels and prodigies, and tell the truth and nothing but the truth" – Polybius, *Histories*, bk3 ch58.

Fact or fiction, Odysseus/Ulysses (below) was the patron saint of ancient explorers. Homer (*Odyssey*, bk1 vv3–4) introduces him as the famed world traveller, going on to catalogue his escapades with the likes of one-eyed giants, cannibals and witches. Of course, without such epic trappings, given the rickety nature of their ships and lack of compasses, every ancient sea dog was by definition an adventurer.

Not just Greeks. Herodotus (*Histories*, bk4 ch42) reports Pharoah Necho II (609–593 BC) as ordering a Phœnician fleet to circumnavigate Africa. It took them two years. Herodotus believed their reported success. Polybius and some other ancients did not. Modern opinion (Cary-Warmington, pp112, 268 n7) is likewise divided. The feat would not be repeated for 2,000 years.

Also, two fifth-century Carthaginians. Himilco (Pliny, *Natural History*, bk2 ch67 para169) was "sent to explore beyond Europe". His reports survive only in the doggerel fourth-century AD Latin poem (vv117–29, 380–89, 406–15) *Ora Maritima* by North African Festus Avienus, a scissors-and-paste jumble also incorporating the log book of an anonymous sixth-century Massaliot explorer. They speak of a vast ocean, tideless and windless, perpetually misty, choked by seaweed, infested with monstrous beasts.

Hanno voyaged down the African west coast with an armada of 60 ships and 30,000 putative settlers, his mission to found cities. A few moderns disbelieve that he could have mastered the prevailing headwinds. He reached at least Sierra Leone ('The white man's grave' tag did not apply), possibly Cameroon. A short Greek text describes (*inter alia*) swift-running Troglodytes (pygmies?), lands burning with fire and perfumes, and above all "savage people, mostly hairy-bodied women, whom our interpreters called 'Gorillas' – these were killed, skinned, and brought back home.

Another such explorer (date uncertain) was Pytheas's fellow-Massaliot Euthymenes, who reported an Atlantic Ocean of fresh water filled with monsters, supposedly source of the Nile (his river was actually the Senegal): Seneca, *Natural Questions*, bk4 ch2 para22.

Cæsar's prime motive (*Gallic Wars*, bk4 ch20) for his British excursion was curiosity about this mysterious place, regarded by many contemporaries (Plutarch, *Cæsar*, ch23 para3) as a poetic fiction. The Byzantine historian Procopius (*Histories*, bk 4 ch20) improves on this, reporting belief that it was 'The Island of the Dead', inhabited by phantoms (AR Burn: 'Procopius and the Island of Ghosts,' *English Historical Review* 70, 1955, 258–61) – some modern tourists may feel this is an apt description.

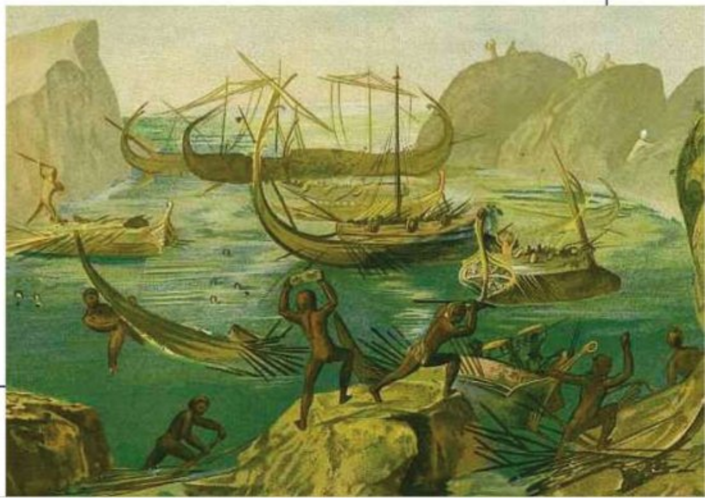
Tacitus (*Agricola*, ch10 para4) credits his father-in-law (who had studied philosophy at Marseilles) with the first circumnavigation of Britain, discovery of the Orkneys, and a glance at the mysterious 'Ultima Thule' (variously identified as Iceland, Norway, Shetland).

Agricola's predecessor in Britain, Suetonius Paulinus (not the biographer), conqueror of Boudicca (aka Boadicea), was the first to cross the Atlas Mountains in North Africa: Pliny, bk5 ch1 paras1–14, itemising cognate discoveries.

A sixth-century Byzantine ambassador to Ethiopia, Nonnosus, described (Photius, *Bibliotheca*, ch3, excerpts his lost *History*) his encounters with a pack of 5,000 elephants, tribes who lived in peace with local wild animals, and (shades of Hanno's 'Gorillas') mysterious humanoids, short, black, naked, hairy, whose language was unintelligible to all their neighbours.

Not forgetting the many anonymous explorers, merchants, sea-dogs, soldiers, *et hoc genus omne*, who provided the likes of historians Herodotus and Ctesias (in Photius, ch72) with their tales of one-eyed Arimaspians, Nubian black spunk, dog-headed Indians, tribes whose hair starts white and ends dark, people without anuses, the inevitable hispidities, etc. etc.

Surely the stuff of ancient science fiction? But, "A library-myth that irritates me most is the classification of books under 'fiction' and 'non-fiction'" – Fort, p863.



John The Baptist relics found

A Bulgarian monastery reveals bone and tooth fragments of the 'messenger'

EUROPICS [CEN]

LEFT: The exquisite alabaster reliquary with its "holy" contents on display.

BELOW: Dignitaries offer reverence to the relics of John The Baptist.

A report from the Bulgarian news agency Novinite claims that some bones of St John the Baptist have been found in a 5th-century monastery on Sveti Ivan (St John) Island, near the seaside town of Sozopol. The remains – small fragments of a skull, jaw and arm, and a tooth – were discovered in an exquisite alabaster reliquary embedded in an altar in the ruined basilica on the tiny island in the Black Sea. The reliquary urn measures 8in by 4in by 4in (20x10x10cm). A Greek inscription contains a reference to 24 June – the date Christians, both Orthodox and Catholic, celebrate John the Baptist's birth – and goes on to say that the relics were brought to the island by a man named Toma.

"We found the relics of St John the Baptist – exactly what the archæologists had expected; it has been confirmed that these are parts of his skeleton," said Bozhidar Dimitrov, Bulgaria's diaspora minister and a former director of the country's National History Museum, who was present when the excavation's leader, Kazimir Popkonstantinov, opened the urn in Sozopol on 1 August.

The Roman Church remains cautious. Fabrizio Bisconti, superintendent of the Vatican Pontifical Commission of Sacred Archæology, said that the Commission "will wait until a more thorough study has been conducted, including anthropological analysis, before it will express an opinion on the finding."

> **"This is a holy find. It doesn't matter about the science."**

Many experts, needless to say, are dismissive, noting that since John the Baptist was first buried in northern Israel around AD 30, scores of churches all over Europe and beyond have claimed possession of significant chunks of his corpse. The Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, once a Christian church, claims to have his head, but so does the Residenz Museum in Munich. There have been sceptics for at least 1,200 years: Claudius, the Spanish Bishop of Turin in the 8th century, noted mockingly: "The citizens of Constantinople claim the head of John the Baptist while the monks of St Jean d'Angély confidently believe that they have it." We recall the old joke about the ingenious cleric who explained that one was the skull of the saint as a young man, the other in his later years.

In the 16th century, Calvin considered the great number of pieces of John the Baptist allegedly dispersed throughout western Christendom: his face at Amiens, the top of his head at Rhodes, the back of his head at Nemours, his brains at Nogent-le-Retrou, part of his jaw at Besançon, the other part at St John in the Lateran, and a bit of his ear at Saint-Flour-en-Auvergne. The Amiens relic was brought to France in 1206, and is still exposed to the faithful every year on the Baptist's feast day (also his birthday: 24 June). A skeleton said to be the Baptist's was found at St Makar Monastery in the Natroun Valley south of Cairo in 1978 [**FT28:45**] – as was a skeleton found in Qumran in the Judæan desert in 2002 [**FT168:22**]. Some of his bones are also said to be in Genoa.

However, the delighted Bulgarian church (and tourist) authorities don't care about any of this. "This is a holy find," said Metropolitan Bishop Joanikii of Sliven, who oversees church affairs in Sozopol. "It doesn't matter about the science. The holy relics of St John radiate miraculous force. I cannot explain it by using words." On 5 August, the relics were paraded through the streets of Sozopol and installed in the Church of St George – also home to a (supposed) fragment of the True Cross and relics of St Andrew. Dimitrov, the diaspora minister and a Sozopol resident, said he hoped the relics would make the town a "second Jerusalem" and lead to a surge in "pilgrim tourism."

Sofia (Bulgaria) Echo, 2 Aug; AOL News, Telegraph.com, 4 Aug; Guardian, 19 Aug 2010; "Restless Bones" by James Bentley (Constable 1985); "Relics and Shrines" by David Sox (Allen & Unwin 1985).

EUROPICS / [CEN]

ForteanTimes

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BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

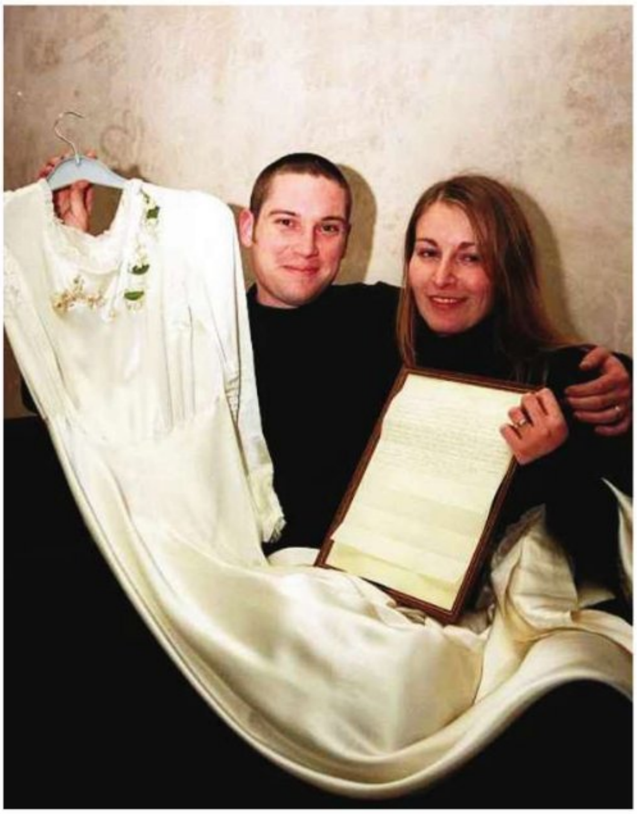
MORE MAIL THAT GOT LOST IN THE MISTS OF TIME

Perhaps the longest delay in the history of postage – 220 years – came to light a few months ago. In 1790, a letter was posted from Paris to the town of Seix, near Toulouse in south-west France – but it was wrongly delivered to the village of Saix, some 150 miles (240km) from its intended destination. Because the recipient could not be found, the letter lay forgotten in a sorting office drawer until 1999 when municipal archives were being sorted out. Another 10 years passed before the decision was taken to officially deliver it on 5 June 2010. "It's about time," said Saix mayor Henri Blanc. The letter turned out to be from officials in Paris refusing a request to recognise Seix as the main town in the area. *D.Mail, D.Mirror, 17 April 2010.*

A moving story came to *FT*'s attention many years ago and then got buried in the archives. In 1997, Helen Allenby bought a hand-made satin wedding dress from the 1940s at an antiques shop in Beverley, East Yorkshire, and wore it when she and her husband Chris were married the following year. When she tried on the dress with help from her mother, they felt something stitched into the hem. It was a letter from a mother to her daughter on the eve of her wedding.

Dated 16 June 1945, the letter, addressed to "Sheila", said of the dress: "I do want you to know that every stitch I have put into it is a token of my deep and everlasting love for you. I thank you for your sweet, unselfish companionship with all my heart, you have been my great joy and comfort darling and I shall miss you. But you will be passing into a new life with dear John where I know you will find untold happiness in his love and care. God bless you both and keep your tender love for each other fresh and radiant through the coming years, your adoring mother."

Mrs Allenby, from Market Weighton in East Yorkshire, said: "By the time me and my mum read it we were both in tears because it was so touching. It is terribly sad because the daughter must never have realised it was there and never



HULL DAILY MAIL / FRAZER HARRISON

CARDS REAPPEAR FROM POSTAL LIMBO

Peter Pan Statue, Kensington Gardens, London

86 YEARS

Card mailed in 1924 with a George V penny stamp was an order for six dozen bramble scythes. It was delivered in October to an address in Sheffield used by a blade-making firm until the 1950s. *Sun, 13 Oct 2010.*

83 YEARS

Black and white card with a picture of Exeter cathedral was sent from Exeter, Devon, in 1927 and finally arrived in Ipswich, Suffolk, 286 miles (460km) away, in July. *Metro, 30 July 2010.*

78 YEARS

Card showing Peter Pan statue in Kensington Gardens (left) was sent on 20 August 1932 by Connie and Muriel Cope to their sister Gwen. The sisters are all dead and their house in Sandy, Bedfordshire, has gone. The card was delivered to a neighbour in July. *Sun, 13 July 2010.*

53 YEARS

Black and white card with a picture of a child was sent from South Africa on 2 November 1957 to JC Belsey at Monkton Wyld Court in Charmouth, Dorset, and signed "Mama". The address is now an education centre for sustainable living but was then a boarding school. *Times, Sun, 23 Aug 2010.*

43 YEARS

In September, the Revd Geoffrey Hollingsworth, vicar of Pocklington, East Yorkshire, received a card postmarked 27 January 1967, with a 3d stamp, and sent from 20 miles (32km) away. It was addressed to Mrs Graham Christie, wife of the vicar of Pocklington from 1962 to 1980. The message recommended that Mrs Christie read the book *A House of Many Rooms* by Rodello Hunter. "It grows on you, like the rooms did!" concluded the message, signed "CC". *Church Times, 1 Oct 2010.*

28 YEARS

Eunice Nicholson, 52, sent a picture postcard from Torbay in Devon to her friend Moira Harfield, 55, in Eastleigh, Hampshire, in 1982. When it turned up in September, Moira rang Eunice in nearby Abbots Worthy. They hadn't seen each other in 10 years. "She came round and we had a good old chat," said Moira. "It was nice to catch up." *D.Mirror, 23 Sept 2010.*

*For the last round-up of late mail, see **FT261:20–21**.*

MASONS / SWNS

read the letter which she was supposed to find on her honeymoon."

After reading about the discovery in a newspaper, Sheila Jennings, 83, who was still living with her husband John in Beverley, came forward. She read her mother's letter for the first time on 24 January 1999 and wept. *D.Telegraph, 20+25 Jan 1999.*

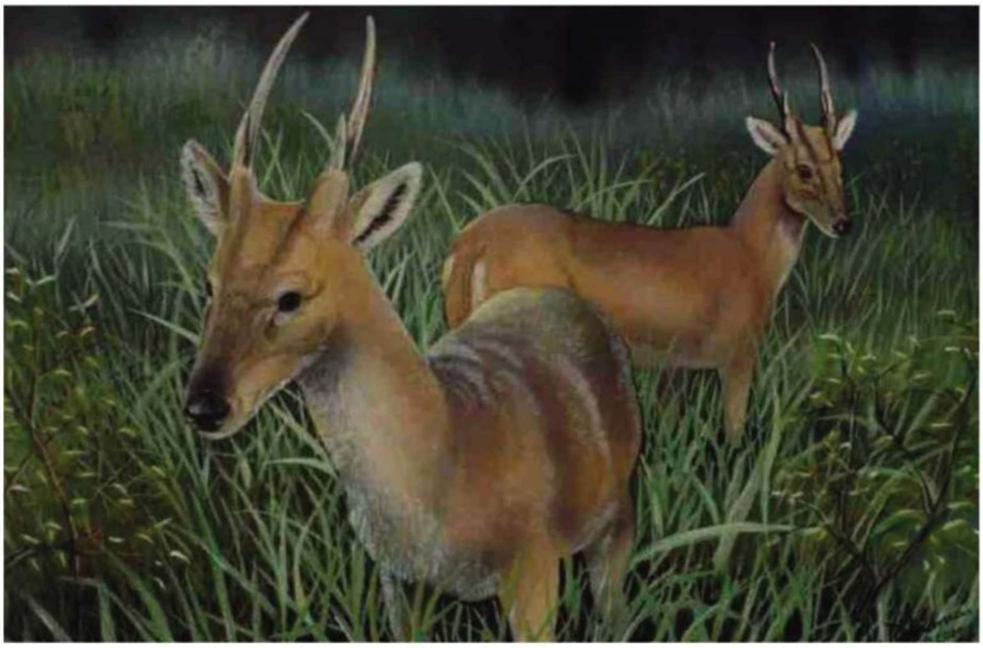
- Archæologists exploring a sixth- and seventh-century Merovingian settlement at Messein in Lorraine, France, came upon a beer bottle containing a letter sent in July 1918 to an American soldier fighting in World War I from his "Aunt Pete" in Oklahoma City. "Its all most [*sic*] impossible to get help of any kind and those you do get are likely to be called up at any time," wrote Aunt Pete. "There is a bunch of darkeys going tomorrow night. They had a big parade today and are going to have a big dance tomorrow at the colored park: we lost our porter… It is so hot here that you could cook eggs in the sand. Gee, Morres, I wish I could visit you now. It sure would be some trip. Robert says he would like to see it all, but he don't think he would like to get in the war…" The envelope and four pages were almost perfectly preserved.

The letter appears to have reached Sergeant Morres Vickers Liepman, of D Battery, 130th Field Artillery, who was serving with the 35th Division of the American expeditionary force in Lorraine. He placed the letter in the bottle and buried it, possibly to preserve it during a German bombardment. The US Embassy in Paris discovered that Liepman enlisted on 25 July 1917, reached Le Havre in June 1918 and fought in the battles of the Argonne, Saint Mihiel and the Vosges. In the autumn of 1918 his unit was stationed in the Haye Forest sector not far from the *noires terres* where his letter was found. He returned to the US in 1919. *Independent, 9 Feb 2008.*

- Two letters from Spain with the postmark "Rapido" arrived on a doormat in Newton Abbot, Devon, in February 2010, 34 years late. They were sent in 1976 by a man called Paco to his parents, Mr and Mrs Hards. *Metro, 8 Feb 2010.*

AZ ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the crypto-zoological garden



FORTEAN PICTURE LIBRARY / WILLIAM M REBSAMEN

ABOVE: A Vietnamese giant muntjac *Muntiacus vuquangensis*, the largest known muntjac species. **BELOW:** A basking shark.

FIVE GO CRYPTO IN INDIA!

Led by veteran field cryptozoologist Adam Davies and including its own intrepid cryptozoological investigator Richard Freeman, the CFZ's five-man expedition to northern India's Garo Hills set off on 31 October 2010, seeking a yeti-like man-beast known as the mande-burung ('forest man'). Said to be up to 10ft (3m) tall, this predominantly black-haired bipedal entity has been reported in this area for many years, and the team will be guided on site by Dipu Marek, who has long sought the elusive creature, discovering 19in (48cm)-long footprints and even nests created by it.

Soon after arriving, the team learnt that a local man had seen a preserved, severed hand believed to be from a mande-burung on sale in a village market, and discovered that this may not be the only cryptid awaiting detection in the Garo Hills. Locals spoke of a hitherto undocumented mystery beast known to them as the sankuni – a huge 45–48ft (14–15m)-long crested snake, one of which was supposedly shot by a group of armed men during 1940 in a lake near India's border with Bangladesh after it had killed several people. Also claimed to exist here is a huge form of muntjac or barking deer, even bigger apparently than the giant muntjac *Muntiacus vuquangensis*, which is currently the world's largest known species and was itself unknown to science until formally discovered in Vu Quang, Vietnam, in 1992 [**FT66:6**, **72:14**, **78:19**]. We await further revelations from the CFZ India Expedition with great interest! *http://forteanzoology.blogspot.com 7 Oct, 11 Nov 2010.*

MONSTER OF MASBATE DEMYSTIFIED

During the night of Christmas Eve–Christmas Day 1996, an extraordinary 26ft (8m)-long carcase was washed ashore on a beach near Claveria in the Philippine province of Masbate. Local observers likened it to a long eel-like creature with a turtle's head, and what looked like a whale's blowhole at the top of its skull. Not surprisingly, zoologists could not identify it or even agree on what it might have been, so the Masbate sea monster soon passed out of the headlines and into obscurity.

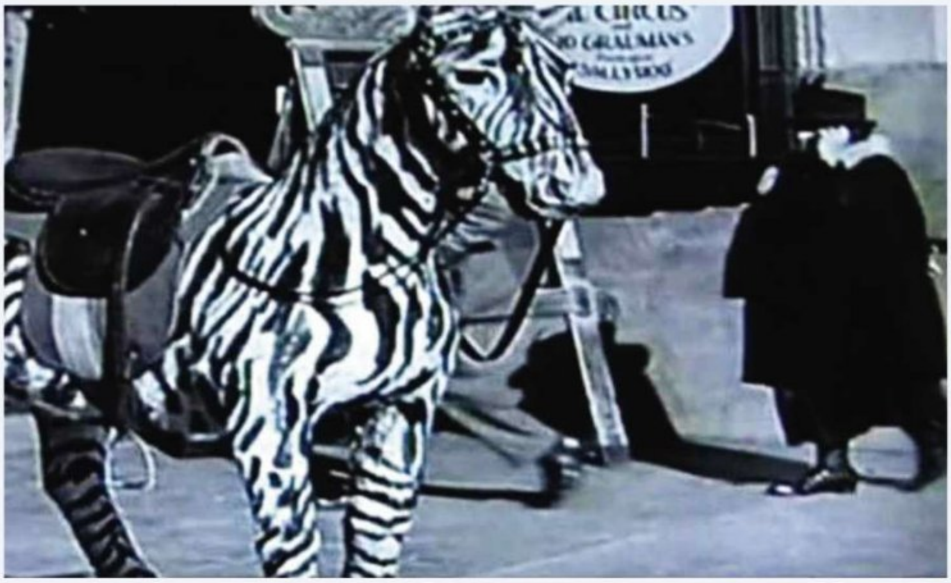
Recently, however, German cryptozoologist Markus Hemmler re-examined this intriguing case, after speculating that perhaps the supposed blowhole was really a cranial opening known as the epiphysal foramen, found in basking sharks, through which the pineal organ extends in life. Checking through the literature, he was delighted to discover that in December 1996, a beached basking shark carcase had indeed been discovered ashore in Masbate – moreover, it was the first of its species ever recorded anywhere in Philippine waters.

Ironically, this specimen had been formally documented in a checklist of Philippine sharks and rays published in 2005, but until now no cryptozoologist had been aware of this publication's significance in relation to the Masbate sea monster – until Markus made the crucial connection, thus solving a longstanding crypto-conundrum. Incidentally, the reason why the carcase had appeared eel-like is that when a dead basking shark decomposes, much of its body dissociates and falls away from its skeleton, sometimes leaving behind only the long slender spinal column (as in this case), which can thus appear superficially eel-like. *http://tinyurl.com/35n2b6r (kryptozoologie-online.de), 31 Oct 2010.*

GREG SKOMAL / SWFS-NOAA

PUZZLING PORTRAITS

An archive film reveals an intriguing figure, a ladder moves in mysterious ways, plus an unlikely Martian



'TIME-TRAVELLER' CAUGHT ON SILENT FILM

The Internet is buzzing with tales of a mobile phone-using 'time traveller' caught on film at the premiere of Charlie Chaplin's 1928 film The Circus. The clip (which can be viewed on YouTube at http://bit.ly/fmXJqF) appears to show a bulky woman dressed in a black coat and hat speaking into some kind of device held up to her left ear as she walks past a zebra outside Hollywood's Chinese Theatre. The odd footage was first spotted and posted online by George Clarke, a Belfast film-maker, in the extras on a Charlie Chaplin DVD boxset.

Speculation on the woman's true identity is rife. Is she listening to a miniature radio or adjusting a portable ear trumpet (as shown below right)? But if so, why would she appear to be talking? Is she shielding her eyes from the sun or her face from the camera? Is she a government operative testing secret new technology, or a mentally confused person talking to herself? Is the whole thing a PR stunt created by Clarke to promote his films? Or could she really be a time-travelling vacationer describing the sights of Golden Age Hollywood to the folks back home...? *MSNBC Technolog, 26 Oct, BBC online, 28 Oct, D.Mail, 1 Nov 2010.*

LADDER MYSTERY

"Warring Monks Threaten Destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre" read a 2008 *New York Times* headline. The report described what is only the latest of the numerous conflicts, some of them violent, among the six different churches that divide dominion over the site in Jerusalem considered by many scholars to mark the tomb of Jesus.

In 1757, the ruling Ottomans promulgated a *firman* (decree) that was supposed to establish a *status quo* defining the rights of the church communities with claims to the site: Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Coptic, Syrian Orthodox and Ethiopian. The *status quo* decree was reaffirmed in 1852. Shortly before the decree was issued, someone placed a

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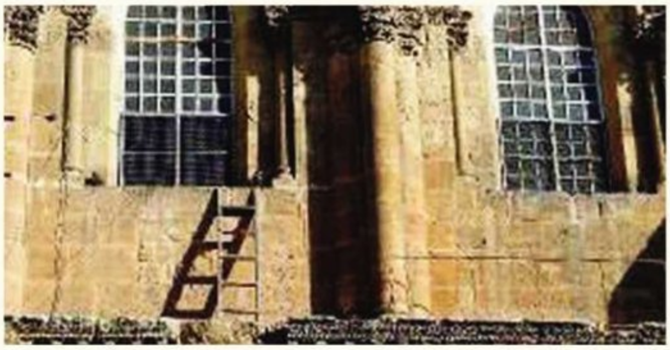
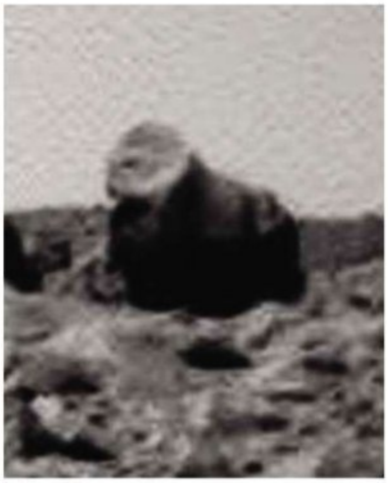


ZOHAR HALFAN

GORILLA ON MARS?

This photograph, sent back from Mars by a robot vehicle, shows a giant silverback gorilla, according to "some space buffs". Nigel Cooper, 43, of Grimsby, Lincolnshire, who has studied thousands of photographs taken by NASA rovers, said: "It's definitely a creature of some sort. I'm convinced there is life out there." While *FT* doubts there are gorillas on Mars, the feature on the horizon in this photograph is certainly enigmatic. *Sun, 3 Mar 2010.*



NASA

wooden ladder on a window ledge above the church entrance, where it has remained ever since. It must not be moved. According to one account, the window belongs to the Armenians, while the cornice on which the ladder rests was assigned to the Greek Orthodox. The ladder therefore sits on the property of the Greek Orthodox, who are the only ones who can go there and alter anything on it; however, it leans on Armenian property, and only the Armenians can change something that touches the window. As neither group controls the ladder, neither may remove it.

The ladder appears in every photograph of the church façade since photography was invented – on the right window above the two-arched entrance to the building (facing, left). So too in many paintings of the façade. However, on 4 February 2009, Zohar Halfan, a student on the national tour guide licensing course, was astonished to see that the ladder had been moved from the right window to the left window! (facing, right) Who had moved it and why? No one seemed to know. Shortly afterwards it was back in its familiar position. *Biblical Archaeology Review, Jan/Feb 2010. For more on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, see* **FT175:76–78**.

KONSPIRACY KORNER

ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF LOBSTER MAGAZINE, PONDERS THE SPREAD OF CHILD ABUSE ALLEGATIONS IN THE INTERNET AGE – HAVE WE BEEN HERE BEFORE?

In September 2010, six men, including Portugal's best known TV personality, Carlos Cruz, and Jorge Ritto, a former Portuguese ambassador, were convicted of sexual offences against children in state-run orphanages in Portugal. Rumours spoke of a thick slice of Portugal's political and media class being part of a vast pædophile ring centred on the orphanage.

The only one of the accused to plead guilty, Carlos Silvino, a former employee at the home, is quoted as saying: "I took some boys to these homes. I have dates and addresses where they went to make movies, attend parties or sex orgies."

The English-language reporting on the affair assumed that all of this was entirely true. But I wonder. We have been here before.

The earliest version of this in my lifetime was the Kincora boys' home affair in Northern Ireland in the 1970s. Then, three gay men working there had abused the boys in their care for almost 20 years. They had survived complaints from the boys, parents and other care workers, because one of them, the late William McGrath, was not only a senior figure in the Orange Order and a friend of the Reverend Ian Paisley, but also an informant for MI5. Rumours spread of boys being taken to big country houses to be used by public figures, including Lord Mountbatten, the former head of MI6, Maurice Oldfield, and Edward Heath. These rumours are still circulating on the Internet.[1]

In the 1990s, we had the North Wales pædophile panic, again centred on a children's home, Bryn Estyn. The initial North Wales allegations mushroomed into a nationwide police trawling operation, offering compensation for victims of abuse in local authority care, and over 100 men were ultimately convicted. But in his wonderful analysis of the case, *The Secret of Bryn Estyn* (reviewed **FT208:62–63**), Richard Webster showed that most of the convictions were probably unsound and the result of a modern-day witch-hunt.

Currently, we have the Hollie Greig affair (referred to in this column, **FT262:21**), in which a Downs Syndrome woman in Scotland has apparently alleged that she was abused from the age of six by a circle of people, including her father and her uncle, a lawyer, her social worker, a policemen and a local sheriff. Once the story reached the Internet, the list of abusers began expanding – as did the list of the abused. The Scottish legal authorities' decision not to prosecute anyone – there was no useable evidence – turned the story into a Scottish-establishment-pædophile-network cover-up. The leading 'investigator', self-styled journalist and broadcaster Robert Green, was arrested in Aberdeen as he was about to distribute leaflets about the case. He then stood in Aberdeen South in the 2010 General Election as 'Scotland Against Crooked Lawyers' (but only got 138 votes).

A public campaign began: meetings are being held across Britain. The BBC was apparently (that word again) going to broadcast the story but backed off (another cover-up!). A great national scandal has been uncovered and an evil or Masonic or pædophile establishment is getting away with it! Despite the lack of evidence, the story is growing and spreading. Everybody from David Icke downwards (or upwards) is joining in – just type "Hollie Greig" into YouTube and see how many hundreds of videos you get.

In the 1970s and 80s, the cry was for 'alternative media'. I began publishing an 'alternative magazine' in 1983. The Net and YouTube mean that anyone, saying almost anything, can broadcast globally, with no initial editorial interference. So why does this type of evidence-free rumour-mongering make me so nervous?

NOTES

[1] See for example http://tinyurl.com/34hjg3f (indymedia.org.uk).

NECROLOG

We celebrate the life of a leading exponent of alternative lifestyles and communal living who contributed much to the counterculture of the Sixties and Seventies.

PA PHOTOS / PA ARCHIVE

SID RAWLE

Dubbed "King of the Hippies" by the tabloid press, Sid Rawle played a prominent role in the squatting and commune movement of the last 40 years. Since young people could be called upon to die for their country, he reasoned, it was only right that each should have a right to a patch of meadow or mountain. "Shared out equally, there would be a couple of acres for every adult living in Britain," he noted in his manifesto, *The Vision of Albion*. "That would mean each family or group could have a reasonably-sized smallholding of 10 or 20 acres and learn once again to become self-sufficient." A burly, red-bearded six-footer with a mane of ginger hair, he was usually clad in robes or a boiler suit, with brightly coloured shawls and strings of beads with animal teeth rattling at his throat. A believer in a literal "commonwealth", he could be seen as a reincarnation of Gerrard Winstanley, the great Digger of the English Civil War. (Sid had a part as a Ranter in Kevin Brownlow's 1975 film, *Winstanley*).

Sid was the son of a sheep farmer on Exmoor who was forced to sell up and become a shepherd. At 16 he moved to Slough, Berkshire, to live with his Romany mother, who had left home when he was six. Here he worked as a park attendant, as a shop steward for the National Union of Public Employees, and had a leading role with the town branch of the Communist Party, organising a strike in a factory and a love-in in the municipal gardens. At some point, he also worked as a cowman, wine waiter and gravedigger. After spending some time living on the beach in St Ives, Cornwall, hanging out with beatniks, he moved to London in the mid-1960s and set up what *Oz* editor Richard Neville called an "ultra-hippy cult" known as the Hyde Park Diggers. By the spring of 1968, the Diggers had more than 200 members, who played a prominent role in the squatting movement and, in September 1969, participated in the six-day occupation by the London Street Commune of 144 Piccadilly, a neglected 100-room mansion. Having painted "Property is theft" in huge letters on the wall, they were duly thrown out by the police.

When he heard of a small village on the North Wales coast that had been abandoned after WWII, he and 20 or so followers occupied it for several weeks before being evicted. In 1970, John Lennon offered Sid custodianship of Dorinish, a tiny island off the coast of County Mayo in Ireland, which he had bought in 1967. Sid recruited a motley group of some 25 people to start a new life there. Even though it turned out to be virtually uninhabitable and plagued by powerful storms, they survived there for almost two years, living in tents before abandoning the project. Sid travelled frequently back to Britain. (In 1972, when he was living in a recently vacated vicarage in Gospel Oak, London, he helped a group including *FT* founding co-editor Paul Sieveking open a squat in nearby Parkhill Road.) He and the Diggers gave away free food at the Glastonbury Fayre in 1971 and worked alongside the anarchist Bill "Ubi" Dwyer to establish a free (but illegal) festival in Windsor Great Park in 1972. The park had been common land before it was enclosed by George III; the hippies were simply reclaiming it. Attendance rose from 700 in the first year to around 7,000 the next. In 1974 the police cleared the site, arresting 200 people.

Sid played a major role in persuading Home Secretary Roy Jenkins to provide a new site at an abandoned airbase at Watchfield, Oxfordshire, where he staged a nine-day people's free festival, which attracted a large, peaceable crowd in 1975. By then, Phil Russell (aka Wally Hope) had established a free festival at Stonehenge. After Wally's death in 1975, Sid became a key figure in the summer solstice celebrations there from 1976 to 1984, performing an almost priestly role. During this period, he also established himself as a resident in the Tipi Valley community in Carmarthenshire, Wales, before creating the Peace Convoy, which in 1981 travelled from Stonehenge to Greenham Common in Berkshire to support the women's peace camp.

In 1982, Sid established the first Green Gathering at Worthy Farm, Glastonbury, which attracted more than 5,000 people. The following year, he set up the Rainbow Village at the disused US airbase at Molesworth, Cambridgeshire, a proposed cruise missile site. The camp was broken up by police on 6 February 1985. These anti-war activities, and the growing size of the Stonehenge festival and the convoy, prompted the Battle of the Beanfield on 1 June 1985, when around 1,300 police officers ambushed the convoy in Wiltshire and went berserk, smashing vehicles and roughing up travellers. More than 500 people were arrested. Sid retired from the fray to the Forest of Dean, where he continued his work through numerous smaller camps and festivals.

After an early marriage ended in divorce, Sid lived communally for more than 30 years, and fathered seven children by various mothers. More of an old goat than a "new man", in later life he began to apologise for his erstwhile male chauvinism.

Sidney William Rawle, activist, born Exford (or Bridgwater), Somerset 1 Oct 1945; died from a heart attack at his annual Super-Spirit summer camp, Westbury-on-Severn 31 Aug 2010, aged 64.

Necrolog continues on page 28

A Startling Memory Feat That *YOU* Can Do!

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Towards the end of the evening things began to drag a bit and finally someone suggested the old idea of having everyone do a 'party-piece'. Some sang, others forced weird sounds out of the piano, recited, told stories and so on.

Then it came to Peter Brown's turn. He said he had a simple 'trick' which he hoped we would like. First he asked to be blindfolded. Then he asked someone to shuffle a deck of cards and call them out in order. Still blindfolded he instantly named the cards in their order, backwards and forwards, without making a single mistake.

On the way home that evening I asked Peter how it was done. He said there was really nothing to it - simply a memory feat - and that anyone could develop a good memory by following a few simple rules. And then he told me exactly how to do it.

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NECROLOG

The founder of the Mary Evans Picture Library – a key image supplier to this magazine – plus an academic who investigated the nature of abductions.

MARK FURNESS

MARY EVANS

Mary Evans and her husband Hilary (whom she had married in 1956) founded the famous picture library that bears her name in 1964. The couple (pictured above) were already avid collectors of old books, pictures and ephemera covering a wide range of subjects. Today the Mary Evans Picture Library – in All Saints' parish hall, Blackheath, south London – is recognised as one of the leading sources of historical (and fortean) imagery, with clients all over the world. It has a staff of 14 and the Mary Evans website holds half a million images. That the library survives in such rude health, when so many small picture libraries have fallen by the wayside or been taken over by corporations, is a testament to Mary's shrewd business mind and the values she instilled in those she employed. She was determined that the library should remain an independent, family-owned business and an employer of local people.

Mary was an accomplished pianist and painter of watercolours, and had a life-long interest in dogs and horses. She and Hilary collaborated on several books, each one illustrated with pictures they had acquired. Among these were *The Party That Lasted 100 Days: The Late Victorian Season* (1976) and *The Man Who Drew the Drunkard's Daughter: The Life and Art of George Cruikshank* (1978). They also compiled the *Picture Researchers' Handbook* (now in its seventh edition), which has become the definitive guide to global image sources.

Mary was instrumental in the foundation, in 1975, of BAPLA (the British Association of Picture Libraries and Agencies), and in setting up the Picture Research Association. She is survived by Hilary, their daughter Valentine and three grandchildren.

Caroline Mary Evans, née Lander, picture librarian and writer, born London 5 May 1936; died 29 June 2010, aged 74.

ALVIN LAWSON

Alvin "Corky" Lawson (right) was best known to forteans and ufologists for his work on abductions, beginning with a 1977 experiment that aimed to compare purportedly genuine abduction accounts with wholly imaginary ones, and found little significant difference.

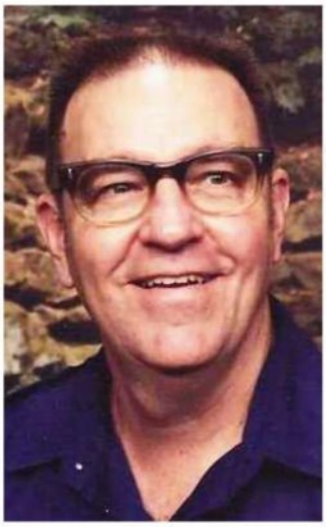
In less rarified spheres, Lawson spent most of his life as an academic. Education was in his blood: he was born in Fort Bragg, California, the son of Roscoe, a school principal-turned-district schools superintendent, and Katherine, a teacher. He graduated from the University of California at Berkeley in 1952, then served in the US Army for the duration of the Korean War. He married Barbara Slade – they had met in a college band, where she played clarinet and he the trumpet – in 1953. In 1958, he took a master's degree and in 1967 a doctorate, both in English, and both from Stanford University. In 1962, he joined the faculty of California State University at Long Beach, where he remained until retirement. He was named professor emeritus in 1990. His particular interests included Nathaniel Hawthorne, Emily Dickinson, and children's literature.

His ufological interests surfaced in a course he devised, called "UFO Literature: The Rhetoric of the Unknown", which explored the language people used when describing UFO phenomena. This was apparently developed partly in response to a call for 'more relevance' in higher education, and therefore just possibly with an element of ironic humour, which Lawson had aplenty. First, and maybe opportunistically, offered in the wake of the 1973 UFO flap, it was highly popular with students during the 10 years Lawson taught it. During this period, Lawson also set up a telephone hotline for people who believed they'd been abducted; this led him to work with clinical hypnotist Dr William C McCall in researching their stories, and in turn to his famous, if controversial, 'imaginary abductees' experiment.

Any faith Lawson had had in the literal truth of abduction accounts began to wane, and to test his suspicion that abductees were fantasising, he recruited, in his own account (1997: online at http://tinyurl.com/2wm29hy (internetarchaeology.org)), "a group of people who knew relatively nothing about CE3 abductions, [and] hypnotized them... We asked them eight simple questions, without additional cueing, and directed them to respond fluently and in detail. Almost all of the sixteen subjects involved gave us interesting narratives with many specific incidents about getting onboard, seeing alien creatures, having an examination, interacting with the aliens, and being returned."

When the experimenters compared imaginary and 'real' abduction narratives, they found "many similarities and very few significant differences between them... Our study provided strong reason to conclude that 'real' abductions are fantasies or hallucinations – especially in view of the complete lack of unambiguous physical evidence supporting any CE3 abduction case." His hope that, following these findings, scepticism about abductions would spread was to be severely disappointed. As he put it: "Since 1977, credulousness about CE3 claims has become more entrenched each year... and almost no serious skeptical alternatives are allowed to join the debate."

One objection to Lawson's conclusions was the size of his sample. Others noted the heterogeneous descriptions of aliens in the imaginary accounts, forgetting that at the time hardly any two



COURTESY LESLIE DIRGO

abduction accounts agreed on the aliens' appearance, while others complained that he had asked leading questions (as if 'real' abduction researchers didn't!) and cherry-picked his evidence besides. No one rushed to improve and replicate the experiment (the simple and obvious test), although in 1987 Jenny Randles used not hypnosis but creative visualisation and free association on 20 subjects, all of them "UFO-naive", to create imaginary abduction accounts. None came up with classic motifs such as 'doorway amnesia' or – most surprising – a medical exam. The imagined aliens didn't resemble Grays, varying enormously in appearance. Asked why the aliens might visit Earth, one respondent remarked: "They'd be trying to get away once they'd realised their mistake."

Surprised and puzzled by his results, but trusting them, Lawson went on to formulate his 'birth trauma hypothesis', which provided a common source for the imagery in both 'real' and 'false' abductions. This relied heavily on Stanislav Grof's interpretation of LSD-induced trance visions, which seemed to him to represent buried memories of an individual's own birth. Lawson's hypothesis demonstrates many parallels between abduction accounts and perinatal imagery, and is certainly coherent; but it seems to be predicated on false premises. How, for instance, does a new-born baby know what it looks like, and so generate the archetypal, fœtus-like image of a little grey alien? "My *blood* is in this work," Lawson once said to me, but ufologists ignored it as studiously as they'd attacked his initial experiments.

A personal note: I first met Al Lawson and heard him expound the birth trauma hypothesis at a CUFOS gathering in Chicago in the early 1980s. The event was made especially memorable by his reaction to Jim McCampbell informing us over a drink that the head of the US government's "UFO project" was himself an alien, and that the aliens were in cahoots with the International Bankers. Alvin stared straight ahead over his G&T, po-faced as his Scottish forebears, and uttered not a word. Never heard much of McCampbell after that, so I suppose either the aliens or the MIB got him and zipped his lips under concrete anæsthetic.

Alvin Houston Lawson, professor of English and American literature and alien-abduction researcher, born Fort Bragg, California 11 Oct 1929; died Anaheim, California 8 Sept 2010, aged 80.

Peter Brookesmith

FOR MORE STRANGE DEATHS GO TO:
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Strange deaths

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

THE MILLIONAIRE OWNER OF THE SEGWAY upright scooter company died on 26 September after riding one over a cliff. Jimi Heselden, OBE, 52, plunged 30ft (9m) into the River Wharfe close to his home in Boston Spa, West Yorkshire. A former miner, he made his fortune developing the 'Hesco' flat-pack wire-mesh blast wall to protect troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. He bought the Segway company in December 2009. He had donated £25 million to charity in the last two years, and died in a tragic act of courtesy – reversing his two-wheel battery-powered vehicle to move out of the way of a walker on a bridle track. *D.Telegraph, Metro, 28 Sept; Sun, 28+30 Sept 2010.*

TERRY COLON

A GIANT BALE OF HAY killed a founding member of the Electric Light Orchestra (ELO) after it crashed into his van at around 12.30pm on 3 September. Cellist Mike Edwards, 62, died instantly after the 300kg/660lb (or 600kg/1,323lb) bale rolled down a steep field next to the A381 near Halwell, Devon, and smashed through a 15ft (4.5m) hedge into the road. Edwards played with the band between 1972 and 1975 and left to become a Buddhist, changing his name to Deva Pramada. He swerved into another vehicle as the bale crushed his cab. The other driver was unhurt. *[R] Guardian, D.Mail, Sun, Metro, 6 Sept 2010.*

SIX FILIPINO WORKERS DIED AT A WATER treatment plant in the Malaysian state of Sabah after inhaling poisonous gas while cleaning a tank. Two of the six, aged between 16 and 30, entered the tank to do cleaning work and when they failed to emerge after an hour, the others went in search of them. *Gold Coast Bulletin (Queensland), 24 Mar 2010.*

RESCUE CREWS RESPONDING TO AN emergency call in Palm Bay, Florida, found three people lying on the ground, not breathing. Melville Braham, 55, his wife Anna, 49, and their 15-year-old son Anthony had attempted to raise a ham radio antenna when they lost control of the pole and it hit an overhead power line carrying 13,000 volts. The woman died at the scene, while the father and son were pronounced dead in hospital. *[AP] 14 Oct 2009.*

TWELVE INDONESIAN CHILDREN DIED ON 6 JUNE while taking part in a ceremony to dispel bad luck after a measles outbreak in a remote village in Aceh province, Sumatra. "There were 37 kids gathered together on a wire-cable suspension bridge when it collapsed and they fell into a river," said district chief Ibnu Hasyim; 25 were rescued with minor injuries, but 12 others, aged 12 and younger, were swept away in the strong currents. The children were watching adults throwing chickens into the river as an offering. *[AFP] 8 June 2010.*

ESTATE AGENT SAMUEL Allfort showed prospective buyers around an £800,000 house in Notting Hill, west London, on 29 June while the owner lay dead on her sofa. He assumed divorcee Katherine Frame, 55, was sleeping and continued with the pre-arranged viewing. He left the living room to view last in case she awoke in time to meet the buyers. He returned to the house after the viewing as he felt "something didn't seem right" and noticed Ms Frame had turned a "yellowish" colour. He called an ambulance, and a paramedic discovered that she was dead. An inquest found she had died from "natural causes exacerbated by chronic excessive alcohol ingestion". *D.Mail, Metro, 16 Sept 2010.*

DEVIN CLIFFORD, DRUMMER WITH THE Canadian dance-punk band You Say Party! We Say Die! collapsed during a performance at Vancouver's Rickshaw Theatre on 16 April, and died in hospital two days later. *National Post (Toronto), 19 April 2010.*

the UFO files

FORTEAN TIMES presents our monthly section featuring regular sighting reports, reviews of classic cases, entries on major ufological topics and hands-on advice for UFO investigators. **The UFO Files** will benefit from your input, so don't hesitate to submit your suggestions and questions.

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FLYINGSAUCERY

ANDY ROBERTS & DR DAVID CLARKE PRESENT THEIR REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

PA PHOTOS / AP / USAF PHOTOS

ALIEN MISSILE MEDDLERS

Aliens have been buzzing our nuclear bases since the end of World War II – and Western governments have been lying to us about the threat to our missiles. It must be true because "upstanding, dry former military chiefs who were trusted with our nuclear security" say so! But the real source of this ripping yarn is American ufologist Robert Hastings, who is obsessed with proving a link between UFOs and nukes, in just the same way that other 'independent thinkers' have tried to persuade us that aliens are coming here to follow 'ley lines' or collect water from our reservoirs.

The idea that aliens are coming here to warn us about our nuclear experiments is nothing new either. It was a favourite theme of contactees such as George King during the 1950s. Nevertheless, Hastings got the opportunity to present his "evidence" at a publicity stunt hosted by Washington's National Press Club in September and brought his roadshow to the UK with a talk at Oxford in November. Hastings says his mission is to ensure that "people everywhere should be given the facts". But Hasting's "facts" are not the same as hard evidence. Instead, we were offered the stories of 'credible witnesses', including Col Charles Halt of Rendlesham forest fame. Halt's account has grown over the years from a sighting of "unexplained lights" in a Suffolk forest into what these days resembles a script for a science fiction film. He now says he saw spacecraft firing beams of light at the Weapons Store in RAF Bentwaters and is convinced the US and UK governments are conspiring to hide the facts from the public.

This type of claim – from a military source – can sound impressive to those unfamiliar with the minutiæ of the story (which includes most journalists). But it is skewered by the fact that Halt's boss, Bentwaters base commander Col Ted Conrad, has told us he saw nothing unusual despite "a sparkling, clear, fogless night with a good field of view in all directions". Even worse, Halt's own laconic official account of the events, sent to the British MoD in 1981, fails to mention any perceived threat to NATO security. By his own account, Halt simply turned around and went home to bed, having failed to get his boss to take him seriously.

Hastings's other key 'credible witness' is Captain Robert Salas, who claims that on one occasion in 1967 a UFO hovered directly over a nuclear weapons store at Malmstrom Air Force Base, Montana (pictured above), causing 10 Minuteman nuclear missiles to malfunction. But virtually every detail of Salas's story has been questioned by James Carlson, whose late father Eric, a Captain in the USAF, was present at the time. He insisted that UFOs had absolutely nothing to do with the failure of the missile system and has produced hard evidence that points to a complex equipment malfunction. Which leads us to ask, if the evidence for aliens visiting nuclear bases is so good, why does Robert Hastings pick such poor examples to prove his case? *D.Mail, D.Express, Sun, 27 Sept 2010; http://tinyurl.com/3458btl (Malmstrom AFB UFO/Missile incident); http://tinyurl.com/3yr3et4 (Col Conrad's statement).*

ROCKING THE CRADLE

Cradle Hill in Warminster, the geographical heart of UFO skywatching during the 1960s and 70s, is under threat. According to Kevin Goodman – who spent many hours as a teenage saucer spotter on Cradle Hill – the Ministry of Defence, owner of vast tracts of land in the area, which abuts their training grounds on Salisbury Plain, has apparently restricted non-military access to the hill by public vehicles. There are even rumours the MoD is trying to restrict vehicular access on the road which leads up the hill. This would mean a long trek on foot for the thousands of ufologists who still visit the hill every year. The twin gods of Health and Safety have been invoked by the MoD, but for ufologists the flat summit of the hill is a place of cultural pilgrimage, and losing the ability to simply drive up the track and park will severely restrict access, particularly for elderly and infirm enthusiasts. Such restrictions will pave the way to eventual closure of the site to the public and the loss of a major site of UFO folkloric relevance. The barn on Cradle Hill should be preserved as a national monument, complete with plaque, forever marking its place in saucer psychogeography. Its walls are adorned with generations of graffiti scratched, drawn and painted by ufologists over the years, and these are a key part of flying saucer history in the UK. Save Cradle Hill now! www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hj3KXF_4gzQ

WHAT DID NEWMAN KNOW

One of the books referenced by Mark Pilkington in *Mirage Men*, his recent account of government mis/disinformation in the UFO world, is Bernard Newman's *The Flying Saucer* (1948), written just months after the first UFO flap. Newman was a career writer but also had very close links with British intelligence agencies. Was the book's theme – a group of scientists who plant stories about saucer crashes and the retrieval of alien bodies – a cunning plan to unite the nations of the world against the threat of a Martian invasion or some other form of disinformation? Well, perhaps it's unlikely, but as Newman wrote: "Facing such a threat, how could countries bicker over ideologies, frontiers or trade barriers?" Now you can read the book and decide for yourself, as it has recently been re-issued in paperback by Westholme Publishing.

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UnConvention 2010

STUART FERROL reports on the 13th *Fortean Times* UnConvention – a wonderfully weird weekend of mind-altering talks, big questions and bawdy ballads. All photos by **ETIENNE GILFILLAN.**

ABOVE: Helen Keen enlists some help from the audience (in the shape of Ben Foong). **LEFT**: Alan Murdie.

2010 was Uncon year. The recent irregularity of *Fortean Times* UnConventions has imbued them with an esoteric edge, a when-will-it-be, where-will-it-be frisson known only to the initiated. It's a bit like an illegal rave where fascinating and mind-boggling thoughts and opinions are the soundtrack and questions the dodgy pills; or maybe not.

Whatever analogy you fancy, October 2010 was the time and the University of Westminster, Marylebone, London, the place. Our hopes were high, our minds open, and the usual questions on our minds: are we alone in the Universe; what happens after we die; what is it with forteans and hats?

SATURDAY

With two streams of talks, stalls and activities happening all at once, it was certain that no two people's UnCon would be the same. Mine started with fellow Geordie Mike Hallowell's talk on the issues surrounding his investigations into the South Shields Poltergeist and the subsequent media feeding-frenzy. It was a white-knuckle ride, not merely due to the shocking tales of online abuse and press harassment that Mike and his fellow investigator Darren Ritson suffered but also due to Mike's narcolepsy, cataplexy, diabetes and heart condition – which, in his own words, could have seen him drop to the ground at any point in his talk. We were, however, reassured that we had his friend Richard Freeman's permission to laugh if he did. Thankfully, everyone made it out alive and I left the talk not only wiser regarding the pitfalls of revealing evidence but also struck by the weekend's first fortean enigma: a paranormal investigator who has to avoid shocks.

Simultaneous talks on fantastical regurgitations and Alien Big Cats of Oz by Jan Bondeson and Rebecca Lang respectively brought us to the last talks before the lunch break. As legendary researcher, broadcaster and fortean Paul Devereux enthralled inhabitants of the Hogg Hall auditorium with 'Magical Mindscapes', I sat down to enjoy long-time *FT* collaborator Mark Pilkington's elaboration on his excellent book *Mirage Men*. Concerning disinformation, double bluffs and controlled leakage of UFO data, his talk was very apt as it touched upon the infiltration of ufology conferences and conventions. I asked him later whether any agents could have been part of the UnCon crowd and he assured me the only dubious infiltrators there that weekend were himself, Peter Brooksmith, David Clarke and Paul Devereux.

Back from lunch and a wander through the modestly sized but fascination-packed hall of stalls, we were faced with the dilemma of choosing between larger-than-life Centre for Fortean Zoology head Jon Downes and his wife Corinna's tales of the Blue Dogs of Texas or Charles Foster's asking whether we were 'Wired For God?' Foster's talk was a refreshingly open-minded view of religious and spiritual beliefs and the parts of the brain thought to be involved. Avoiding the reductionism of mainstream neurology, which insists that reproduction of similar sensations and their mapping in the brain showed the organic roots of spirituality, he instead raised the question of whether these propensities of the brain were actually there to enable us to communicate and experience the world of the transcendental and the spiritual. It was inspiring stuff, leaving us suitably enlightened for the last two sessions of the first day.

As an unashamed *Doctor Who* fan, I had, sadly, to miss Jeremy Harte's reportedly fascinating and funny look at headless apparitions and instead headed towards *Who* and *Captain Britain* scribe Paul Cornell's entertaining exploration of fortean themes in *Doctor Who*. As well as laughs aplenty, there were many fascinating facts here, including the revelation that *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* author Henry Lincoln was a writer of classic *Who* serials and was responsible for the creation of UNIT lynchpin Col (later Brigadier) Lethbridge-Stewart.

There were more laughs to be had in the last session of the day as comedian and writer Helen Keen took to the stage in Hogg Hall to present her hilarious and informative show 'It *is* Rocket Science'. The award-winning production had recently been aired at the Edinburgh Festival and Sci-Fi Oktoberfest before being invited to UnCon. With a blend of stand-up, shadow puppetry and audience participation, Helen took us on a sometimes personal but always irreverent tour of rockets and rocket-making from World War II to man's first steps on the Moon.

After having *Fortean Times* recommended to her while doing research for the show, Helen quickly became a fan, and she told me that performing at UnCon had been quite a thrill: "I loved the audience of forteans! It was obvious that a lot of the audience were interested in the same kind of stuff that I am. I got a friendly heckle about Jack Parsons being, strictly speaking, a Thelemite not a Satanist – where else would that happen?"

And so we were let out, unsupervised, into the early London evening, some of us heading off to imbibe alcohol and theories with the various visiting forteans, others, like one UnCon virgin I spoke to, to lie down in a darkened room and try to take it all in.

SUNDAY

Sunday came, as inevitably as the two different kinds of hangover with which we headed off once more towards Marylebone. As the pious migrated to their own churches, we began the holiest day of the week appropriately enough with Edinburgh Fortean Society daddy Gordon Rutter's exploration of the history of talking to the dead. Stretching from the oldest known book to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (whose most famous creation stood in statue form on the opposite side of the road), Gordon's talk was the perfect mind-laxative to prepare us for the rest of the day.

As Ian Simmons regaled us with examples of 'Fantastic Taxidermy', including modified roadkill and a computer mouse that was also an, erm, mouse mouse, the CFZ's Zoological Director Richard Freeman, with a camera crew in tow, described how he believes he has finally found the elusive, upright-walking orang-pendek. Exciting news indeed; I was disappointed that there was no actual specimen chained, King Kong-style, against the wall. Maybe next time.

I stayed in Hogg Hall for recent *FT* cover story authors Matthew Alford and Robbie Graham's double bill of talks on government and military interference in Hollywood. Robbie took us back to the heyday of 1950s American TV and an episode of short-lived adventure serial *Steve Canyon*, whose UFO plot raised the ire of the US Air Force and was censored almost out of existence. Matthew took up the matter of the recent cover story with his investigation into the mysterious death of scriptwriter Gary Devore. Intriguing and possibly scary stuff – and a question from an audience member about claims by off-the-rails actor Randy Quaid, made public on that very day, that actors such as Heath Ledger and David Carradine had been assassinated by a Hollywood Hit Squad, brought the issue right up to date.

In a mysterious case of time dilation, it was lunch hour once again; so, another trip to the stalls and a go at ASSAP's 2010 Paranormal Olympics. Completing the tasks based on such psychic phenomena as ESP, dowsing, psychometry and telekinesis, I was amazed that my results were quite so far from what chance would dictate. In fact, they were so bad that I must be an example of whatever the opposite of psychic is. All good fun though, and the full weekend results can be found at www.assap.org.

With heavy hearts but full bellies, we entered the last stretch of this year's Uncon. While Andy Roberts had predicted my illegal rave analogy with his talk on drug-related urban myths, I settled down to some lewd and scandalous 17th-century broadside ballads from BBC Radio 3's Lucie Skeaping accompanied by colleague Douglas Wootton on suitably 'period' stringed instruments. We were entertained with political satire, bottom hygiene advice and tales of prodigious piscine pistles. It was during this session that the audience of forteans was introduced to the most gut-churningly frightening experience of UnCon 2010, something so terrifying that even the most hardened of paranormal investigators were groaning in horror – a singalong! Perhaps it was the extremely bawdy nature of much of the material that elicited such an enthusiastic response from the audience…

Failing miserably to get into a packed-to-the-rafters talk by *FT* Ghostwatch regular Alan Murdie on 'Sex and the Poltergeist', I headed for the 'Forteana and Fiction' panel discussion. Here, fantasy and horror writers Mark Chadbourn, Adam Nevill and Natasha Mostert talked about their fortean influences, their own anomalous experiences and the very mysterious act of writing itself. This was the first panel of the day, immediately followed by arguably the centrepiece of the whole weekend – the ufology panel.

It's been 30 years since the events in Rendlesham Forest and their huge impact on – particularly British – ufology. Speakers who had delved into this mystery over the weekend, David Clarke and Ian Ridpath, were joined by Paul Devereux and "Britain's own Fox Mulder" Nick Pope in a panel hosted amiably by the incomparable Peter Brookesmith.

The debate ran from the amusing and irreverent to heated and back again. Background radiation readings were dismissed, delays in reporting the incident scoffed at, and Nick Pope terrorised by Ian Ridpath's "BS Alert" slide that flashed up on the screen behind them, *QI*-style. During questions from the audience, the possible future of ufology was glimpsed as talk turned to the mysteries of consciousness and phenomena such as lucid dreaming. Paul Devereux's example of a particularly vivid lucid dream led to questions of how perfect an alternative reality our own brains can conjure up and how this impacts on UFO sightings. We had perhaps come full circle, back to Jung's theories of UFOs as projections of our souls; or maybe – as in one of his own dreams – they are not a projection of us, but we are a projection of them.

To end on lucid dreams seemed highly appropriate. All good UnConventions make you feel as if you've fallen asleep while reading *FT* and dreamt that you were in the magazine with the writers talking to you, and you alone. And this year was indeed a very good UnCon. Here's to the next one… whenever and wherever it may be. FT

TOP: Bawdy balladeers Lucie Skeaping and Douglas Wootton. **ABOVE: LEFT:** Richard (there's a cryptid on my head) Freeman. **ABOVE RIGHT:** *Doctor Who* scribe Paul Cornell. **BELOW:** All the way from Oz – Rebecca Lang.

FLYING SAUCERS OF THE GODS

When the Wise Men followed the Star of Bethlehem, were they really having a Close Encounter? **TED HARRISON** traces the links between religion and UFOs and examines the rise of extraterrestrial theology, from Erich von Däniken to David Icke. MAIN IMAGE: **ALEX-TOMLINSON.COM**.

Over 40 years ago, a Swiss hotel manager produced a book that was to launch him as a bestselling author and turn an obscure and eccentric theory into a widely discussed, if unorthodox, take on human prehistory.

Erich von Däniken's book *Chariots of the Gods* argued that the gods of human religion were not supernatural beings from a world of spirit, but visiting aliens from advanced extraterrestrial cultures (see **FT169:30–37** and *passim*).

The evidence cited was wide-ranging. Von Däniken (below) identified several ancient artefacts and drawings as models and images of astronauts. He claimed mysterious lines in the deserts of South America were extraterrestrial airports and he also quoted from religious scriptures.

At first glance, the opening chapter of the Old Testament Book of Ezekiel certainly seems to give credence to the theory. It contains a curious and enigmatic description of a close encounter between the prophet Ezekiel and what was described as "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord".[1]

I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north, an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The centre of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was that of a man… As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the ground beside each creature with its four faces.

This was the appearance and structure of the wheels: They sparkled like chrysolite, and all four looked alike. Each appeared to be made like a wheel intersecting a wheel. As they moved, they would go in any one of the four directions the creatures faced; the wheels did not turn about as the creatures went. Their rims were high and awesome, and all four rims were full of eyes all around.

When the living creatures moved, the wheels beside them moved; and when the living creatures rose from the ground, the wheels also rose. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, and the wheels would rise along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels. When the creatures moved, they also moved; when the creatures stood still, they also stood still; and when the creatures rose from the ground, the wheels rose along with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels.[2]

GETTY IMAGES / ISIFA / RADIM BEZNOSKA

Was the Prophet Elijah the victim of an early alien abduction?

The mainstream explanation, to be found in Jewish and Christian teaching, is that Ezekiel's vision is "perhaps the closest anyone comes in the Hebrew Bible to offering a description of God".[3] But if, in fact, Ezekiel had seen a flying saucer and its extraterrestrial crew, then the 'God was an alien' hypotheses starts stacking up.

And the Ezekiel vision is by no means unique. Other passages in the Bible can be interpreted in a similar manner. What about the Prophet Elijah's sudden ascent to the heavens, leaving behind just his clothes: "As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind." [4] Could this have been an early alien abduction?

In a similar vein, we might ask what was the Star of Bethlehem that led the Wise Men to the baby Jesus? (See panel, p36) Or the pillar of fire that guided the Israelites? Or the strange object witnessed by the prophet Zechariah, just after he had been shown what the Bible account describes as a "gold lamp stand with a bowl at the top with seven lights on it and seven channels to the lights"?[5]

"I looked again – and there before me was a flying scroll… thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide." (9 x 4.6m)[6]

Contemporary descriptions of alien craft often describe them as cigar-shaped. The prophet, being unfamiliar with cigars, chose a simile closer to his own experience to describe whatever it was he saw.

VISHNU'S FLYING CHARIOTS

Turning from the Judæo-Christian tradition to that of the Hindu scriptures: The *Bhagavata-Purana*, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, the holy books of epics and legends, contain multiple references to flying objects of various shapes:

Dhruva saw a very beautiful chariot descending from the sky that illumined him and the ten directions as if the full moon itself was appearing. There he then saw two beautiful demigods in it with four arms, a blackish skin, being quite young and with eyes reddish like a lotus flower, holding clubs, attractively decorated with helmets, bracelets, necklaces and earrings.

Not only did Dhruva witness the chariot, he was invited aboard to take a ride through space, much in the manner of later UFO contactees.

As the associates of the creator of this entire universe, of the Godhead… have we approached you to take you with us to where the Lord resides. The position of Vishnu, so difficult to reach that not even the greatest of enlightenment can achieve it, has been conquered by you. Come and simply see the supreme abode which the moon, the sun, the other planets and the stars circumambulate to the right. Never ever was this achieved by your forefathers or even others, O dear one; come and live there in that supreme position of Lord Vishnu who is so worshippable for the inhabitants of the universe. O immortal soul, you are worthy to board this unique heavenly chariot that was sent to you by the Praised One, the head of all living beings.[7]

There is even a collective term for these airborne vehicles of the Hindu tradition – be they described as thrones, chariots or even carpets. They are the *Vimana* (see **FT267:53**). And those that travelled across time and space, perhaps originating from other star systems, are known as the *Devas* – equivalent, some would argue, to the angels of the three monotheistic faiths, Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

Stories which can be interpreted as relating to visitations by creatures of superior intelligence to Earth's more primitive inhabitants are widespread and found in many cultures. Ancient Chinese writings tell of rulers of greater wisdom and knowledge who could travel by flying. Tibetan accounts make mention of kings coming from the stars. Records have survived, it is claimed, from the Sumerians and the Egyptian Pharaohs that fit equally well with the notion of alien visitations. Whether the vehicles are described as "like flying pearls", as in Tibetan sources, or as "flying fire-breathing dragons", to use Chinese terminology, perhaps there is a common thread linking all the descriptions.

Despite their belief in the Jinn, a whole race of spirits of fire who inhabit the Earth, Muslims find no direct references to possible UFO visitations in the *Qur'an*. However, they share and revere the Biblical stories known to Christians and Jews; and the possibility of the existence of other creatures in other parts of the Universe is seemingly endorsed in scripture. God holds the option to gather all the creatures of the Universe together, says the *Qur'an*: "One of His signs is the creation of the Heavens and the Earth and what He has spread forth in both of them of living beings; and when He pleases He is all-powerful to gather them together."[8]

Thus, an alien encounter on Earth is not theologically impossible – and neither is space travel ruled out: "O ye assembly of Jinn and men! If it be you can pass beyond the regions of the heavens and the Earth, pass ye! Not without authority will ye be able to pass! Then which of the favours of your Lord will ye deny?"[9]

But as a warning to any future Muslim astronauts, the *Qur'an* warns: "Neither on Earth nor in Heaven shall you be beyond reach: nor have you any guardian or helper besides Allah."[10]

Von Däniken was not the only modern-day populariser of the theory that the Gods of old were space travellers. There have been several others who have gone on to put a whole additional spin on the theory.

ELOHIM, NEPHILIM ET AL

One widely read writer on such topics was the late Zecharia Sitchin (see next issue's Necrolog for his obituary), whose followers believe Earth has been visited by a race of extraterrestrials from a planet called Nibiru (or Planet X – see **FT173:39–41; 265:38–39**), whose orbit, he claimed, lies beyond that of Neptune, and comes closest to Earth every 3,000 years, bringing with it natural disasters, such as the Great Flood

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM – PLANETARY CONJUNCTION, SUPERNOVA OR UFO?

Maybe the Star of Bethlehem
Wasn't a star at all – Neil Young

According to St Matthew's account in the Bible, sometime after Jesus was born, 'wise men' came from the east looking for the baby, bringing with them gifts of gold, frankinsense and myrhh. Their only navigational aid was a star, which eventually "came and stood over where the young child was".

The wise men, it is generally believed, were Persian astrologers known as Magi. So is it possible that the star was not a conspicuous object in the night sky at all – Matthew doesn't say it was particularly big or bright – but an astrological deduction?

Few people find that a satisfying explanation. Almost since the beginning of Christianity, scholars have been looking for an astronomical explanation. The third-century theologian Origen speculated that the star might have been a comet. It is a theory with which one modern astronomer agrees. The eminent mathematician and astronomer Professor Chandra Wickramasinghe cites independent astronomical evidence to support this theory:

"Chinese astronomers of the Han Dynasty recorded the appearance of a comet in the spring of the year 5 BC. It was a spectacular comet with a very long tail and it lasted for 70 days.

"The comet explanation is particularly compelling if one accepts at face value the story that the 'star' stood still over a particular place.

"There is only one type of astronomical object that can appear to stand over a particular spot, and that is a comet. A long upward-pointing comet tail can give the impression of its head pointing to a place – the stable where Christ was born."

Four hundred years ago, Johannes Kepler, the German astronomer who produced much key early work on the movement of planets, suggested an alternative theory. The star, he suggested, was the notable conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn. More recently, astronomer Dr David Hughes identified three such alignments during 7 BC – the year that many scholars believe to be that of Jesus's birth. Other suggestions have included a double eclipse of Jupiter by the Moon and a supernova (two of which appear to have occurred in 4 and 5 BC.

ALEXANDER TOMLINSON

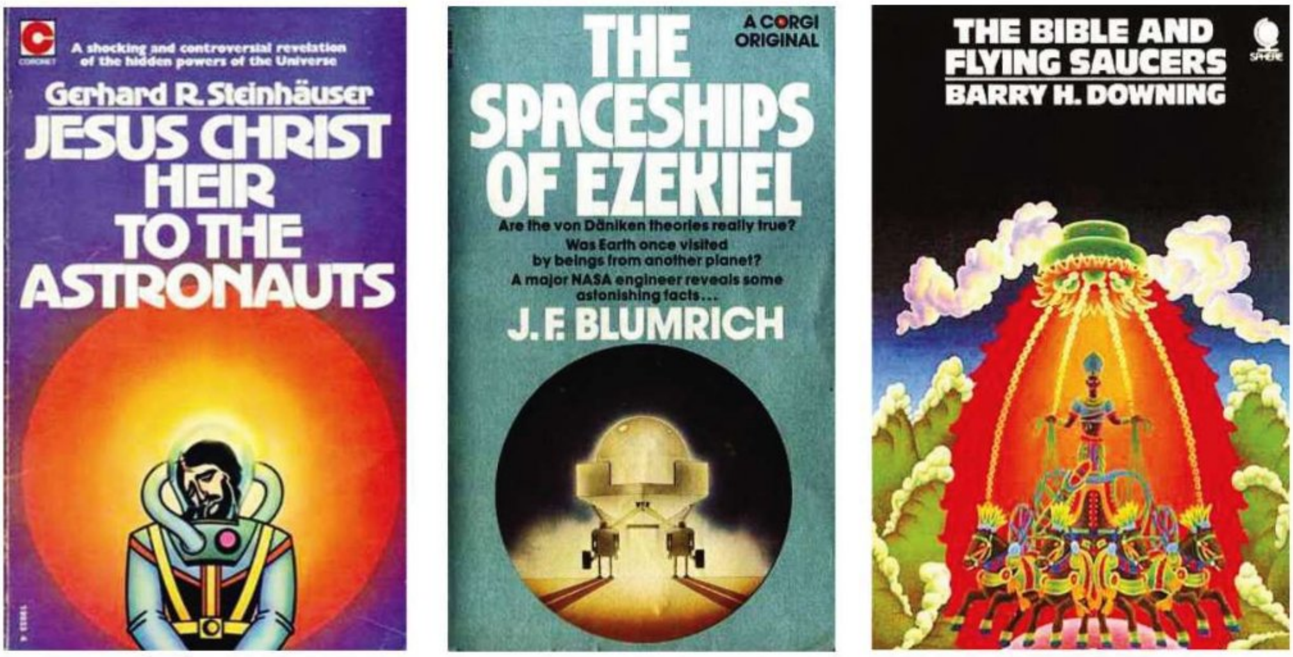
The problem with all conventional explanations, even that of a comet, is that the Bible is clear: the star did not travel east-west across the sky with the Earth's rotation, but north-south. The wise men followed it from Jerusalem, where they met Herod, to Bethlehem, due south. So, the conclusion drawn by some Christians is that the Star of Bethlehem cannot be naturally explained by science.

Sceptics, of course, find the simplest solution to be that Matthew invented the Star of Bethlehem (it doesn't figure in Luke's account of the nativity) – Martin Gardner, for instance, wrote that in his "not-so-humble opinion, the story of the Star is pure myth, similar to many ancient legends about the miraculous appearance of a star to herald a great event, such as the birth of Cæsar, Pythagoras, Krishna… and other famous persons and deities."[1]

Unless, of course, it was something else, literally out of this world. What lights are reported as moving across the sky, zig-zagging in various directions, stopping and then being seen to hover close to the ground? Some writers have suggested that the Star might have been a piloted extraterrestrial craft; some have even posited that the angelic visitation to the shepherds – in which "the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified" (Luke 2:9) – complete, as it is, with dazzlingly bright lights – describes a close encounter of a kind often described by contemporary witnesses.

NOTE

[1] http://tinyurl.com/296xhah (csicop.org).


A shocking and controversial revelation of the hidden powers of the Universe
Gerhard R. Steinhäuser
JESUS CHRIST HEIR TO THE ASTRONAUTS
A CORGI ORIGINAL
THE SPACESHIPS OF EZEKIEL
Are the von Däniken theories really true? Was Earth once visited by beings from another planet? A major NASA engineer reveals some astonishing facts...
J.F. BLUMRICH
THE BIBLE AND FLYING SAUCERS
BARRY H. DOWNING

ABOVE: *Chariots of the Gods* spawned plenty of imitators in the 1960s and 70s. **BELOW:** Rael, founder of a somewhat racy modern saucer cult.

related in Genesis.

Sitchin based his ideas, he says, on his study of Mesopotamian iconography and symbology. In his book *The 12th Planet*, he claimed that this unacknowledged planet was known in ancient times and was the home of the Anunnaki, an advanced human-like people who bred modern *Homo sapiens* through genetic engineering in order to produce a race of slaves.

In his last published work,[11] Sitchin returned to the Book of Genesis: "The sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose… The Nephilim were on the earth in those days – and also afterward – when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown."[12]

Sitchin speculates that Noah, who with his family survived the flood, might have been one of these heroes of old. If so, and if we are all descended from him, then we all have alien DNA in our make-up!

Other believers in the idea that the gods have left a genetic imprint in the human race include the followers of Rael (see **FT142:6; 168:6**). They believe the extraterrestrials responsible for designing human beings were the Elohim, who, when returning to check up on their creations, were mistaken for angels or gods. Rael, whose original name was Claude Vorilhon, is an ex-racing driver who leads a religion – officially recognised in the USA – which claims to be the largest UFO religion in the world. He tells of having a dramatic encounter with a humanoid being from another planet at a volcano park in the centre of France:

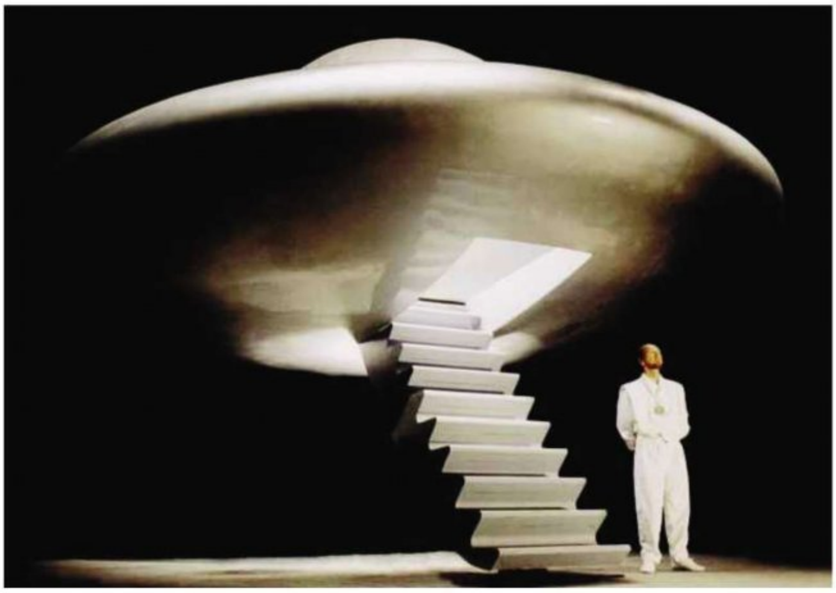
> *This extraterrestrial gave him a new detailed explanation of our origins and information on how to organise our future. Rael accepted the mission given to him, to inform humanity of this revolutionary message and to prepare the population to welcome their Creators, the Elohim.*
>
> *In every culture on Earth, a messenger is expected, whether it is the Maitreya of the Buddhists, the Messiah of the Jews, the Paraclete of the Christians, or any other name that has been given by the many tribes around the world. This expected messenger, like all the previous ones, isn't supposed to please everyone, but to state what our Creators are expecting from us. This is what Rael has been doing for more than 30 years.*[13]

The Raelian church is probably best known to the outside world for its desire to restore the swastika as a religious, rather than political, symbol, its claims about alien and human cloning and its liberal teachings on sexuality. One of the FAQs on its website asks: "I read in the papers that you organise orgies, is this true?"

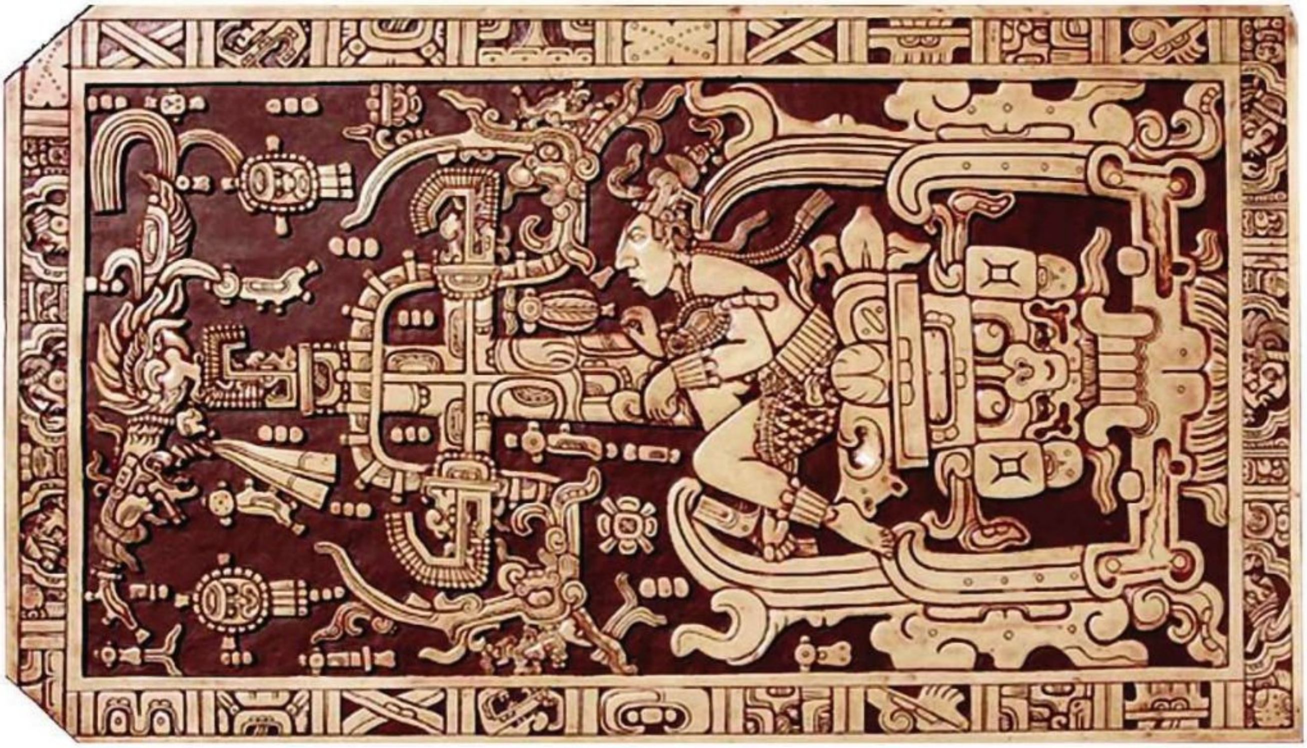
Despite the common thread – the idea that the human race was visited in ancient history by space-travellers – the various popular versions differ enormously. The contrast between, for instance, the work of Robert Temple and David Icke could not be greater.

Temple's book *The Sirius Mystery* was published in 1975 and explores the claim that the Dogon people of Mali have a tradition that Earth was once visited by travellers from the star system of Sirius. These alien visitors brought the human race higher knowledge, and the legend explains the Dogon interest in, and seemingly advanced knowledge of, astronomy (see **FT140:30–31**). While Temple's work has been challenged, his claims were relatively cautious ones and have not spawned any form of religious movement.

By contrast, David Icke, the former professional goalkeeper and television presenter who in 1991 told Terry Wogan that he was the Son of God, has become



GETTY IMAGES / AFP



ABOVE: The famous Palenque 'spaceman' identified by von Däniken in *Chariots of the Gods* (below) as proof of his thesis was, in fact, a local ruler called Pakal.

synonymous with the extreme end of extraterrestrial theology. Here, beliefs about alien visitors suggest that they are not necessarily benign. Living underground, says Icke, are communities of shape-shifting reptiles who are a malign force in the world and manipulate the minds of the mass of the human population via world leaders under their control. (See **FT129:30–31**)

Predating Rael, Sitchin, Icke, von Däniken and others was George King, founder of the Aetherius Society. The then-taxi driver's contact with alien life-forms can be dated precisely to a day early in 1954, when out of the blue he heard the command, "Prepare yourself. You are to become the Voice of the Interplanetary Parliament." From that day until his death in 1997 (obit. **FT104:49**), King became the channel by which the alien intelligence identified as 'Mars Sector 6' communicated with the human race.

Today, The Aetherius Society, which he founded, is a worldwide organisation with an avowedly altruistic agenda whose aim is to help heal and uplift humanity through spiritual action. As the Society's literature puts it:

> *Our world is accelerating into a world of selfishness and materialistic hedonism causing an increase in violence and terrorism around the world and a rapid depletion of Earth's resources. The solution is spiritual action, true dedicated tireless spiritual action for the many. The Cosmic Masters, our spiritual elders from other worlds, have come again to help us in our time of need. They come now to you, with compassion and desire to help. They come with great hope, offering mystical tools of white magic that can give you the spiritual power available only to advanced adepts centuries ago.*[14]

David Icke's beliefs suggest alien visitors are not benign

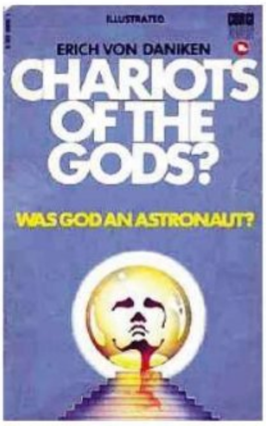
ACCORDING TO THE EVIDENCE

So, if the idea that contact with extraterrestrial beings explains many ancient and modern religious movements is widely believed in some quarters, how plausible an explanation is it? Have the prophets and seers who have reported what sound like alien encounters really seen alien life forms, or have they and their followers misinterpreted experiences – perhaps hallucinations – of a more mundane kind?

Hard, verifiable evidence is scarce. Sitchin challenged scientists to look for alien DNA in the 4,500-year-old bones of Queen Puabi of Ur. She was described as a goddess, he claimed, and might be close enough in ancestry to the original space-travellers for their genetic input to be identifiable. But even he accepted this might be a long shot and emphasised the *might be* in his suggestion.

As for von Däniken – since his claims were first published, several of the pieces of his supposed evidence have been specifically debunked. His own background, which includes a spell in a Swiss jail for fraud, has been exposed and his credentials as a scholar challenged.

What is noticeable from his own writing is that while von Däniken makes much of supposed scientific evidence, he has little grasp of the science himself. For instance, he presents as an amazing and significant fact that the area of the base of the Pyramid of Cheops divided by twice its height gives us the figure Pi: 3.14159.



"Here our slippery trickster has made a claim which is easy enough to understand, but its refutation requires a higher level of mathematical sophistication, which is all the better for letting the deception go unnoticed!" wrote Robert Sheaffer in his essay "Science or Charlatanism?"[15]

Other pieces of 'evidence' adduced by von Däniken have come under similar attack. Famously, he claimed that a carving in Palenque, Mexico, showed an 'ancient astronaut' seated in a spacecraft – the smoking gun that proved the Maya, like ancient cultures all over the world, had been visited by gods from outer space. In 1977, the BBC's *Horizon* programme broadcast an episode called the "The Case of the Ancient Astronauts", in which von Däniken's theories were subjected to critical scrutiny. The experts weren't impressed: "Archæologist and Mayan expert Dr Ian Graham explained his view of the figure on the Palenque Stone. 'Well I certainly don't see any need to regard him as a spaceman,' he said. 'I don't see any oxygen tubes. I see a very characteristically drawn Maya face.'" [16] The carving showed not an alien visitor, but a celebrated Palenque ruler called Pakal.

Even the suggestion that there is an ancient airport in the South American desert has proved to be misguided, according to the sceptics. The precise purpose of these and other large-scale 'lines' remains mysterious, but they can be explained as the artwork of the Nazca people. "The 'lines' include not only lines and geometric shapes, but also depictions of animals and plants in stylised forms. As the online Skeptic's Dictionary entry points out:

> *If Nazca was an alien airfield, it must have been a very confusing airfield, consisting as it does of giant lizards, spiders, monkeys, llamas, dogs, hummingbirds, etc., not to mention the zigzagging and crisscrossing lines and geometric designs. It was very considerate of the aliens to depict plants and animals of interest to the locals, even though it must have meant that navigation would be more difficult than a straight runway or a large clearing. Also, the airport must have been a very busy place, needing 37 miles [60km] of runway to handle all the traffic. However, it is unlikely spacecraft could have landed in the area without disturbing some of the artwork or the soil. There is no evidence of such disturbance.* [17]

A point left unaddressed by the sceptics, though, is why a pre-industrial people, with no ability to get airborne, would have create artworks which can only be appreciated from the air.

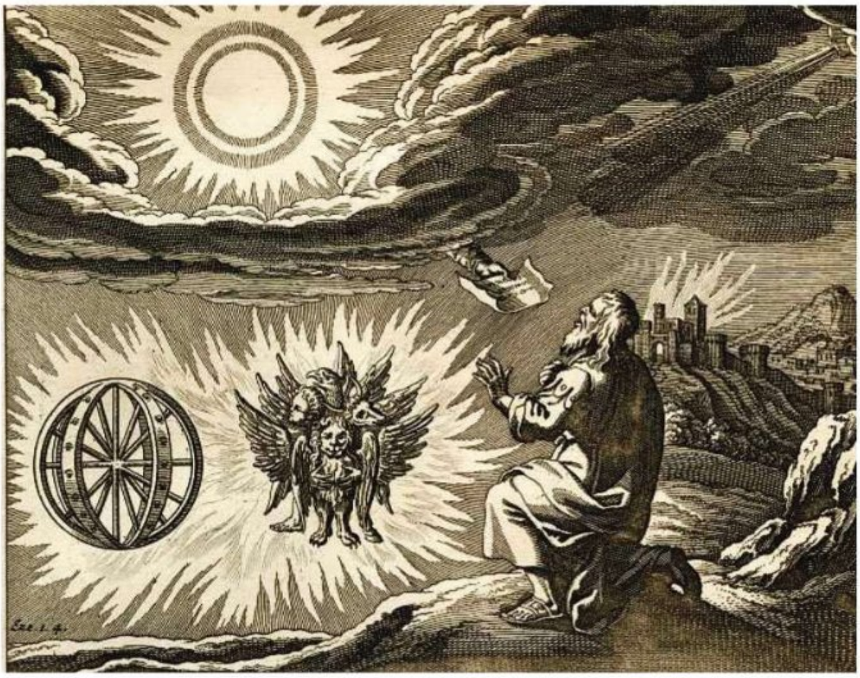
Whichever side of the debate one is on, there is no disputing the fact that all the vivid images from scriptures and ancient writings which have in modern times been identified as descriptions of aliens, have alternative if less romantic interpretations.

For instance, the strange wheels and multi-faced humanoids described by Ezekiel have been linked to the sculptures of guardian spirits set up by the Babylonians at the gates to their palaces which Ezekiel, as an exile in Babylon, would have seen.

In an era in which rapidly advancing technology has become widespread and science fiction more popular than ever, ancient writings attract new interpretations. Descriptions of extraordinary events, which began life as poetry, fantasy or symbolism, have attracted new literalist meanings in an age when space travel is possible and extraterrestrial life somewhere in the Universe accepted as plausible.

There is no indisputable evidence that any of our ancestors could fly, or had ever met a race of people who had conquered flight. Yet, if we move away from the literal interpretations of von Däniken, we would have to conclude that, long before the invention of aircraft, there was nothing to stop ancient cultures from *imagining* the possibility of flight, in much the same way that we today imagine the possibility of time-travel.

Some scientists have hypothesised that we may indeed have regular contact with alien life forms, but not as spacecraft and little green men. They come to Earth as space dust bringing new viruses and epidemics. Far from bringing genetic benefits capable of turning grunting primitives into Mozarts and Shakespeares, our space visitors bring us new strains of flu and plague.



ALAMY / THE ART ARCHIVE

ABOVE: Ezekiel's encounter with strange wheels and multi-headed beings might not have been an alien encounter, but a vision inspired by sculptures he saw during the Babylonian exile.

Unless of course there is evidence, but it is being suppressed. In 1962, did a certain Dr Tsum Um Nui really succeed in translating the mysterious 12,000-year-old inscription on the Dropa or Dzopa disc from Tibet and present it for publication? Did it confirm the story that the writers of the inscription were aliens stranded on Earth when their spacecraft crashed? Was the publication of the doctor's paper ruthlessly suppressed by the academic hierarchy? Was the whole Dropa story merely satire and fiction, as was later claimed in this magazine? (See **FT75:57; 109:39**.)

Or did the shape-shifting reptiles order the author to confess to a hoax in order to cover up a disturbing truth? **FT**

For more on the links between UFOS and religion, see next issue's Dictionary of the Damned entry on Contactee Cults.

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TED HARRISON is a former BBC religious affairs correspondent and author of many books, including *Diana: Making of a Saint* (2007). He also produced and directed the documentary *And Did Those Feet?*

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MEETING JESUS AT OXFORD

◆

ED DUTTON has spent a decade researching the strange fact that undergraduates at Britain's oldest and most respected universities are far more likely to undergo conversion to fundamentalist forms of Christianity than other students. Could the answer lie in a combination of hothouse educational environments and the very architecture of our brains?

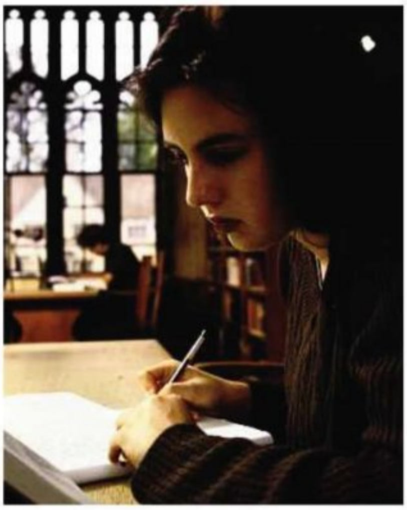
◆

The second the new students arrived, the Christian Union set about introducing them to Jesus.

In my case, we hadn't even parked in front of my hall of residence (an outbuilding of Durham University's College of St Hild and St Bede), when we were approached by a beaming third-year offering to help me and my parents unpack.

"What a friendly guy!" I remember thinking as he assisted us in unloading the massive computer, the heaving suitcases and the telly. As I got chatting to other freshers, our helper chimed in: "OK, Ed! It was really nice to meet you! I've left an invitation to a party that we're having! It'd be great if you could come along!"

It was the "Hild Bede College Christian Union Chocolate Party". And it heralded my initiation into a new world… a world where students hear the voice of God, experience visions, enter trances where they speak in tongues and where atheists have dramatic conversions to fundamentalist Christianity. And the more I looked into it, the more I found that this was much more likely to happen to students at elite universities such as Oxford, Cambridge and Durham. If you get into a 'respected' university it can open many doors – and you're much more likely to meet Jesus while you're there… but why?



ALAMY / NETWORK PHOTOGRAPHS

'CHRISTIAN' MEANT 'FUNDAMENTALIST'. GOD WAS REAL: THEY HAD MET HIM

THE CHRISTIAN UNION CHOCOLATE PARTY

During the Fresher's Week leading up to the party, I found that four people on my corridor of 15 were 'fundamentalist' Christians. They rejected pre-marital sex, evolutionary theory and the university's drinking culture, regarded the Bible as the inerrant Word of God, went to church twice on Sundays and, naturally, joined the Christian Union (CU). They dressed slightly differently ("modestly", the girls called it), spoke differently (no swearing, lots of Christian 'dialect') and used the word 'Christian' only to mean 'fundamentalist'. Indeed, you had to "*become* a Christian" – "give yourself to God", usually after a dramatic experience of Him. For these people, God was real: they'd met Him. I was fascinated. I was definitely going to the Chocolate Party.

At first, it just seemed like harmless fun with lots of very polite, upper-middle-class Christians. There were games, jokes and a lot of chocolate eating. But the atmosphere changed when a girl called "Naomi" arose to give her 'testimony'.[1] She explained that when she'd arrived at Durham two years earlier (it was 1999 at the time), she had regarded herself and her church-going parents as 'Christian'; she soon realised that she wasn't, and was "going to go to Hell". Then, one evening on our corridor, she was having a shower when Jesus appeared to her and told her to follow him.

"I broke down… just crying my eyes out and that's when I gave myself to Jesus." She was "sad" that her parents would "go to Hell" but they had "rejected His offer". With tears in her eyes, she ended: "And I know my place in Heaven is secure."

Naïve, sceptical theology student that I was, I got talking to "Naomi" afterwards and proceeded to throw the contents of my recently completed A-Level in Christian Theology at her and, specifically, the Philosophy of Religion Module, which armed me with numerous (I thought unassailable) proofs that this world was your lot. She

ABOVE: People wait outside Brasenose College, Oxford, during 'Beating the Bounds', a traditional marking of parish boundaries taking place each Ascension Day.

ALAMY / THE OXFORD YEAR GRAHAM HARRISON

obviously found this threatening, and I'll never forget her response. Her eyes became glassy and cold. It was as if I was no longer in front of her and she was looking through me. She continued to respond to my points, but all the time confronting me with this deeply unnerving, zombie-like stare.[2]

Over the coming months, it was as if Jesus lived on our corridor. A female English student from Kent, an Anglican but not a 'fundamentalist', had a "moment of revelation" when she realised she was going to Hell and dumped her non-Christian boyfriend. A female Christian from north London realised that she hadn't become a Christian "when I was 15 like I originally thought", but only now. "I was in my room, on my bed, and I just realised 'Oh my God! I'm going to Hell basically!' I was just crying on my bed – I just totally broke down – and I just felt Jesus guiding me to him." In consequence, she stopped "snogging random guys". Then a male student on the corridor, a militant atheist, had a vision of God one Sunday afternoon: "I saw this face in the wall opposite my room and I realised it was God. Then I heard this voice say, 'You know I'm real,' and felt this unbelievable joy and certainty, like I was drowning in joy." For days afterwards, he would continue to hear God say, "You know I'm real." And he *knew* he was. A female student, an atheist and the daughter of an atheist, found herself – quite inexplicably – writing in her diary one day: "You are a Christian. Remember this day."

These religious experiences went way beyond just my corridor. By the third year, people started to admit one of two things. Either they'd been lying in the first year when they said they weren't virgins, or they'd had had some kind of numinous experience.

The strange thing was that friends who had gone to former polytechnics hadn't experienced anything like this. But friends who had gone to similar 'old school' universities had found exactly what I had. What was going on? Why were these 'conversion experiences' and fundamentalist groups so big at these elite colleges?

OXFORD AND ABERDEEN

If anything, Oxford University's Christian Union (OICCU – Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union) was like Durham to the power of 100. Firstly, it was far more 'Charismatic' – the music, the encouragement to dance and wave your hands, the sometimes hypnotic speakers, all tended to contribute to an atmosphere in which religious experience was more likely to occur. The group had the same religious and ethical beliefs as the CU at Durham, but it was much larger, with more frequent meetings. Here, now a PhD student, I found that around a quarter of OICCU members had become Christians while they were at Oxford. This included students from non-Christian backgrounds (20 per cent of all members) and students from non-fundamentalist Christian backgrounds who'd *thought* they were already Christians when they turned up and were effectively told by OICCU members that they weren't.

Converts tended to be more over-the-top than established Christians, and would often play for status by openly speaking-in-tongues and prophesying at OICCU meetings. I remember one female student shouting hysterically, "Oh, thank you Jesus! Thank you Jesus! Thank you Jesus! Sha-la-la-la-la-la!" And the 'testimonies' were strikingly similar to those I'd heard at Durham: "I felt more and more like I didn't make sense without Him there and then I realised that maybe that was Him telling me something. So I prayed, I prayed harder than I've ever prayed, and I just dedicated myself to God… Oh! It's good to be back!" publicly proclaimed a male Christian who had previously 'back-slided'.

But at Aberdeen University, the CU was very different. Members weren't as 'fundamentalist', some might be inclined to date a non-Christian (though premarital sex was always a no-no) and they were much less inclined to dress differently or try to evangelise other students. Almost none of the members had become Christians while at university and, in fact, very few had ever had religious 'experiences' at all. This difference couldn't just be put down to dour Scottish Calvinism – quite a few weren't

Calvinist and, anyway, there are histories of charismatic revivals amongst Calvinists. Nor could it be explained by Oxford having a more active CU, because we're still left asking *why* it is more active. Why was Jesus appearing – and with such strength – to students at Oxford and Durham but not at Aberdeen University?

SELFHOOD AND SUFFERING

According to anthropologist Pascal Boyer, religious experience is a by-product of human evolution and 'cognitive architecture', which has given us an "agency over-detection system". This is a useful adaptation; if we see a rock from a distance and assume it's a wolf, then no harm is done when it turns out to be, in fact, just a rock. If it is a wolf, then our survival might be a consequence of our early perception. Our human ancestors had to deal with predators and prey, and in both situations there is an advantage to over-detection.[3]

For animals, environmental and 'pack' knowledge are separate 'domains', like the blades of a Swiss-army-knife, while for us, they're intermixed: so we can perceive agency (pack knowledge) in nature (environmental knowledge).[4] And, as pack animals, we have evolved to be highly suggestible (hypnotisable) and acquiescent to the pack leader. This is a potent mix, and means that when we are 'hypnotised' – something caused by being deeply relaxed or fired up – we are far more likely, with our evolutionary hard-wiring, to perceive agency in the world, to accept what we're told by dominant people and to be very fervent about it.

Universities like Oxford seem to induce something like this state to a far greater extent than universities like Aberdeen. Oxford is like one of the tribal 'Rites of Initiation' studied by anthropologists. It raises the status of 'children' to that of fully fledged 'adults' who are destined to run the tribe – and graduates from prestigious universities are the ones expected to run *our* tribe. Just as with the Ndembu of Zambia,[5] for example, they reach this higher status through suffering. Oxford cuts off its 'neophytes' from the tribe so it can break them down and refashion them anew, indoctrinated with new values and ways of thinking. "David", one OICCU interviewee, certainly found university difficult.

"I hated it at first. I was so overjoyed to have got in, but after a few weeks I hated everything about it. I just wanted to go home." Oxford took him away from *everything* that his sense of self was built on: his hometown, his family and friends. It placed him in a college with people he would have had little to do with before: students from all over the country, from affluent, privately educated backgrounds, who had often been to boarding school and had a gap year, making university far less traumatic for them. Oxford has numerous ways of attacking your sense of who you are: formal meals and other rituals where everyone has to wear the same clothes, the shared trauma of near-constant essays, a weekly academic inquisition, the sole purpose of which is to question everything you believe makes sense, and exposure to extremely intense relationships and their almost inevitable break-down. Oxford is infamous for its rates of student depression.[6] The whole point is to break you down, and so it's little wonder that religious fundamentalism thrives in such an environment. Research in America has found that Christian students who go to Christian colleges tend to come out more liberal; Christian students at Ivy League Universities become more 'fundamentalist' as their faith is challenged and they react to it by creating a fortress.[7]

PERSINGER BELIEVES VISIONS ARE CAUSED BY SEIZURES IN THE TEMPORAL LOBE

Aberdeen University is very different. Most students are from state schools, many are from the local area, there are very few rituals, essays are infrequent, exams less nerve-racking, students do not live in intense colleges, there isn't the 'expectation' attached to going to an elite institution; overall, the experience is less distressing, less likely to make you question who you are, and less likely to lead to a religious conversion.

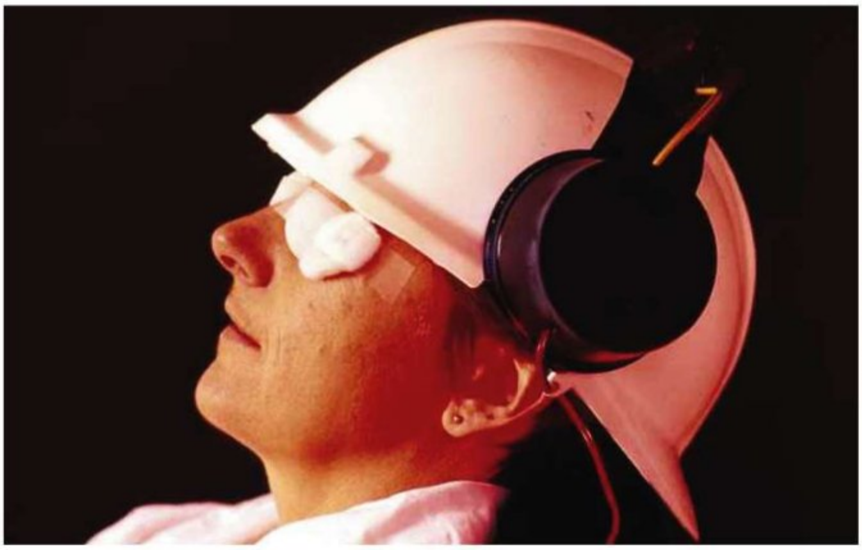
So, is this why students at Oxford and Durham "meet Jesus" more often than those at Aberdeen? It probably plays a big part; but why do some students from the same backgrounds convert while others don't?

Evangelical priests have suggested that Oxford University students are just brighter and so more likely to get to the truth – which is evangelical Christianity. The Rev. Simon Ponsonby, vicar of one of the churches attended by OICCU, takes this view. He argues that the difference is there because at Oxford there are "highly intelligent students, seriously, intellectually considering the claims of Christ and profoundly convicted by the truth. Having done numerous evangelistic-type events in colleges and for OICCU, followed up by determined questioning, I can assure you that the intellectual, rational and reasonable nature of the Christian faith is very important in people coming to faith."[8] But conversions are *emotional* epiphanies, and are unlikely to relate directly to high levels of rational intelligence. Intelligence may well be an issue, just not in the way Rev. Ponsonby and others suggest.

GOD ON THE BRAIN?

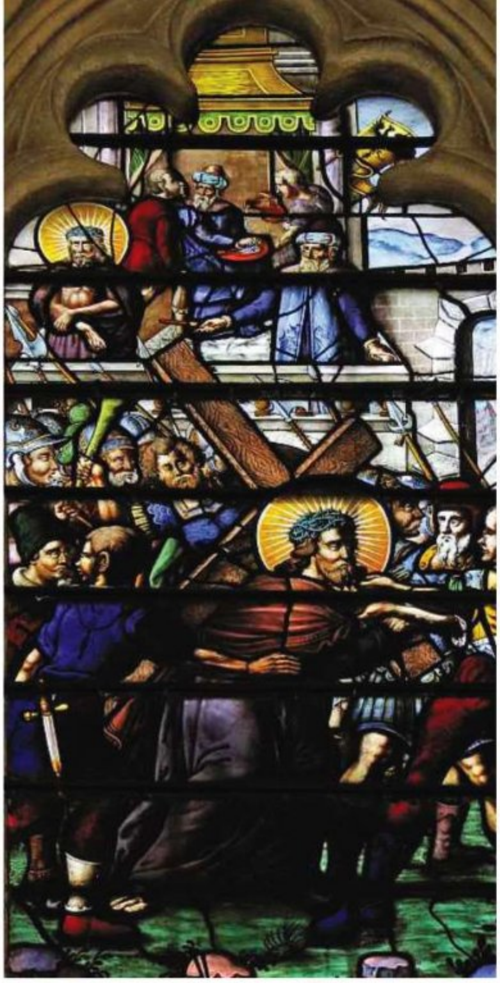
Michael Persinger (see **FT42:50–54; 201:39; 205:4–5**) has spent decades studying religious experiences, and has even patented a machine which, in most subjects (though not Richard Dawkins!)[9] allows him to induce a religious experience in the lab by electrically stimulating certain parts of the brain. Persinger believes that religious experiences occur due to the stimulation of the temporal lobe area. The brain is divided into four 'lobes,' symmetrical on each side: frontal, parietal, occipital and temporal. The temporal lobe is involved in auditory processing and the processing of speech and vision. It is also the location of the hippocampus, which plays a vital part in long-term memory and spatial navigation. The amygdala too is found deep within the temporal lobes, and plays a key part in processing memory and emotional reactions. "Visions," says Persinger, "are caused by electrical microseizures within deep structures of the temporal lobe." These microseizures are caused by stimulation of the amygdala area, which relates to strong emotions.

"People who reported greater numbers of different types of paranormal experiences also reported greater numbers of temporal lobe signs," explains Persinger. "We have



TOPFOTO / FORTEAN PICTURE LIBRARY / DR SUSAN BLACKMORE

ABOVE: Michael Persinger's "God Helmet" can induce a variety of emotions by altering the magnetic field around the brain, including the invoking of religious feelings.



LEFT: A detail from one of the windows of Wadham College Chapel, Oxford.

found a moderate strength (about 0.6) positive correlation over about 30 years of data collection between experiences consistent with elevated electrical sensitivity in the temporal lobes (particularly in the right hemisphere) and the propensity for mystical and conversion experiences. The temporal lobe scales are also correlated moderately with indicators of creativity, imagination, memory capacity and suggestibility… I would suggest that perhaps the students selected to attend [Oxford University] display more of these capacities in addition to their high intelligence."[10]

Oxbridge students are obviously very intelligent – only a tiny minority of the very strongest candidates get in. Though it remains unproven, the high intelligence of Oxbridge students is likely to be coupled with a high level of creativity – which might be a significant factor behind the high levels of conversion experience at such universities.

In another report, Persinger surveyed two groups of male and female university students. He found that people who reported religious experiences in this survey were more likely to enjoy reading and writing. In understanding the difference between Oxford University and Aberdeen University in terms of conversions, 'intelligence' – or creativity or original thinking – might, therefore, be a factor.

Rejects from Oxford and Cambridge tend to go to certain respected universities such as Durham and Bristol. However, many English students at Aberdeen are rejected by these universities, while Scottish students (the overwhelming majority) have sometimes been rejected by Edinburgh or Glasgow. Accordingly, the putative lower level of creativity amongst these students – taken together with the university environment's lower psychological intensity – might help to explain the relative lack of conversions at Aberdeen (and elsewhere). The evidence seems to indicate significant variations in intelligence within prestigious universities,[11] making it even more likely that the issue is 'creativity' which, beyond an IQ of 120, is independent of intelligence, reflecting a psychotic 'personality type'.[12]

And there is striking evidence of a relationship between 'hypnotisability' and a high level of creative intelligence. 'Grade 5' individuals – those highly susceptible to hypnosis – make up about 10 per cent of the population. Though more inclined to feeling than reasoning, 'Grade 5s' are usually of formidable intelligence, able to focus and concentrate to quite an extraordinary degree – even to the extent that they can become victims of this capacity because so easily hypnotised. Such people can get effortlessly into a trance state, and are accordingly extremely prone to religious experiences. Their lack of cynicism means they are particularly open to the merits and demerits of different points of view – they would check out a CU meeting rather than just dismiss it as nonsense. They also have extremely good memories (something vital to high performance in both written and oral exams).

"The Grade 5 has an excellent memory. Like a sponge absorbs water, they take in everything," explain psychiatrists Herbert and David Spiegel. Grade 5s, with their superb recall, can regress under hypnosis to their child-selves with an extraordinary degree of accuracy, always remaining in the present tense. Highly intelligent students are likely to be very competent at acquiring knowledge and approaching new knowledge with open minds. However, the flipside of this is that they are prone to hypnosis, which could lead both to religious experiences or, in extreme cases, brainwashing.[13]

So is Jesus stalking the corridors of Durham and Oxford because the type of intelligent-creative students there are just far more prone to indoctrination and hypnosis – the very kind of experiences that such pressurised environments induce?

Of course, religious experiences can happen in other places, and can have far subtler effects on how people see the world than those I found in the Durham or Oxford CUs. Then there are those not particularly religious students who've had religious experiences and, as a result, have not become fundamentalists, but rather much more critical and less willing to assert anything with absolute certainty.

"I had an experience," one former Oxford student told me, "of a kind of tunnel opening up, inviting me to travel down it. It makes you think, certainly. It makes you more critical of the things you hold to be true."

And a Durham music student, arriving at university as a Christian, had a kind of 'de-conversion experience' which has just left him wondering about the nature of the world and particularly sceptical of people who claim "to have some gnosis, you know, some ultimate truth". Perhaps, then, universities like Oxford can add not only to the Christian but also to the fortean fold… FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Dr EDWARD DUTTON is an anthropologist and freelance writer living in northern Finland. His main interest is Finnish culture and religious experience. He is the author of *Meeting Jesus at University* (2008) and *The Finnuit: Finnish Culture and the Religion of Uniqueness* (2009).

NOTES

[1] All names have been changed to protect the privacy of those involved.

[2] According to cult expert Marc Galanter, this "glazed, withdrawn look" is a classic sign of a "religious cult" – "the trance-like state appears to protect the sect's 'boundaries' by disturbing the perceived antagonist". Marc Galanter: *Cults: Faith Healing and Coercion*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p107. See also Edward Dutton: "Eye-Glazing and the Anthropology of Religion", *Anthropology Matters*, 2007, 9:1, http://tinyurl.com/2vo6cd5 (anthropologymatters.com).

[3] Pascal Boyer: *Religion Explained*, William Heinnemann, 2001.

[4] Steven Mithen: *The Prehistory of the Mind,* Thames & Hudson, 1996.

[5] See Victor Turner: *The Ritual Process*, Aldine Publishers, New York, 1969.

[6] Shirley Fisher: *Stress in Academic Life*, Open University Press, Buckingham, 1994.

[7] Philip Hammond & James Hunter: "On Maintaining Plausibility: The Worldview of Evangelical College Students", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1984, 23:3.

[8] *Pers. comm*, July 2009.

[9] As recorded on *Horizon: God and the Brain*, BBC2, broadcast 17 April 2003.

[10] *Pers. comm*, July 2009.

[11] C Mascie-Taylor, A MacLarnon & P Lanigan: "Personality and IQ Score Variation in Cambridge Undergraduate Sample", *Journal of Biological Science*, 1983, 15:501–508.

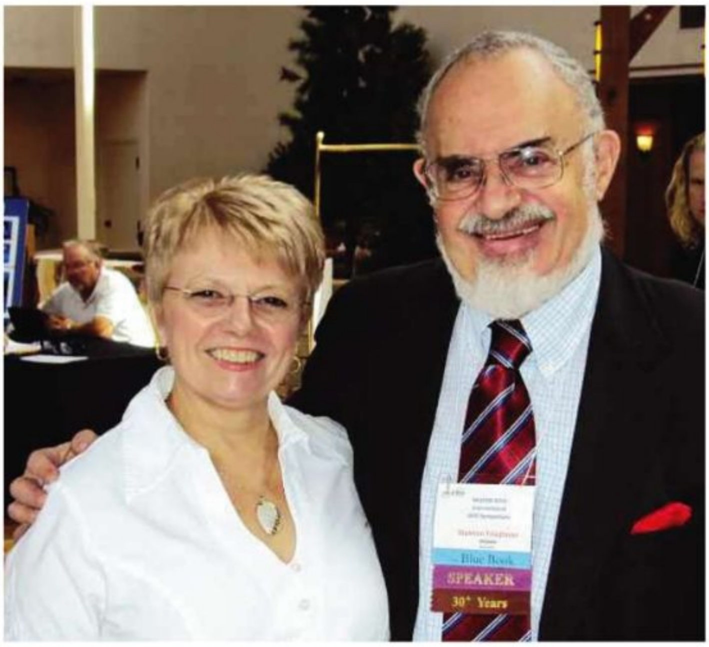
[12] HJ Eysenck: "Personality and Intelligence: Psychometric and Experimental Approaches", in Robert Sternberg & Patricia Ruzgis (eds): *Personality and Intelligence*, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

[13] Herbert Spiegel & David Spiegel: *Trance and Treatment: Clinical Uses of Hypnosis*, American Psychiatric Association, 2004.

FBI FORTEAN BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

109. 41st MUFON Conference

NICK REDFERN heads for Denver, Colorado, and finds that Disclosure is the topic on everyone's mind.



NICK REDFERN

ABOVE: Kathleen F Marden (left), the niece of Betty Hill, argued that some abduction cases continue to defy easy explanation, while Stanton Friedman (right) complained about scientists' comments on UFOs.

Held over four days (22–25 July) within the pleasant confines of the Denver, Colorado, Marriott Tech-Centre, the 41st symposium of the Mutual UFO Network was – as it always is – a Mecca for those who adhere to the notion that sightings of, and encounters with, UFOs are firm evidence that aliens walk among us. Indeed, MUFON makes very few bones about the theory that 'they' are here. And, largely, the roughly 400 attendees were in full agreement.

In other words, this isn't UnConvention, where you're more likely to hear Jonathan Downes trumpeting about Tulpas, Dr Dave Clarke holding forth on Ghost-Lights, or Ian Ridpath taking a rationalist axe to the Rendlesham encounter. But, if you like your UFOs saucer-shaped and piloted by unsmiling little grey fellows, then this is the event for you. So if you weren't able to attend, what did you miss?

Certainly one of the most eagerly anticipated lectures of the weekend was that of Richard Dolan, author of the planned three-volume series *UFOs and the National Security State* (two down, one to go). Whereas Roswell, Area 51 and alien abductions were all once guaranteed to get the ufological faithful foaming at the mouth, today it's Disclosure. And that's right: if you want to please the crowd, you'd better spell it with a capital 'D'.

The notion that 'the Government' is finally going to tell us the 'truth' about UFOs has been rapidly gaining momentum in the last few years, not least due to the vocal interventions of Steven Greer, of the Disclosure Project, and the Paradigm Research Group's Stephen Bassett – both of whom believe that revelations concerning an ET presence on our world may soon be forthcoming. Of course, such claims have been made for decades and none has ever resulted in any meaningful revelations. But let's give Rich the benefit of the doubt.

Dolan's talk was fluent, thoughtful, carefully delivered and avoided sensationalism. It was focused not so much on when or how Disclosure might come, but what life might be like for all of us afterwards. He has a new book out shortly on this very subject, entitled *A.D., After Disclosure: The People's Guide to Life after Contact*, which he has written with Bryce Zabel, co-creator of the short-lived 1990s science fiction television series, *Dark Skies*.

Dolan sees both good and bad in the future: on the positive side, he noted that if alien technology really is in the hands of the American elite, then its release into the public domain may well serve to end our reliance on fossil fuels. Similarly, major advances in medicine and biotechnology could lead to 'super longevity'. He cautioned, however, that the United States of today seems to be drifting towards a state of near-fascism, and there are powerful players who have a lot to lose if oil becomes redundant, and who might not want the world radically rearranged as a result of overnight cosmic revelations. The battle for Disclosure is being fought right now, Dolan emphasised.

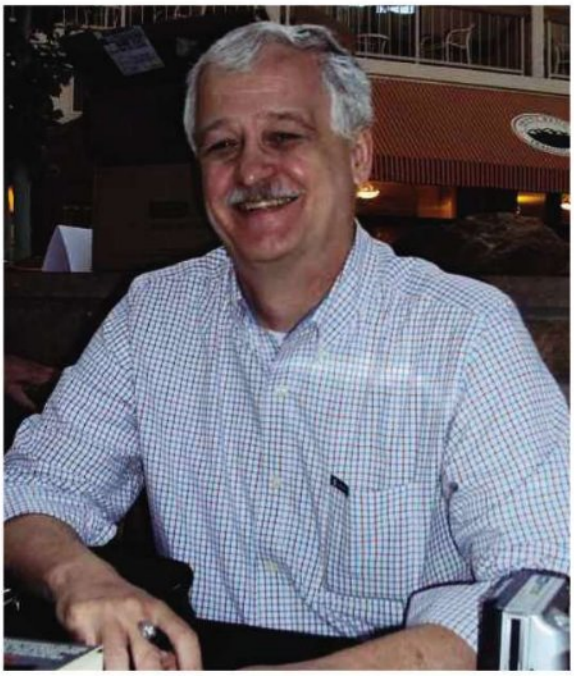
The audience loved it: they cheered and clapped, hoping that they – unlike every single ufologist who has come before them – will finally receive validation for their cherished extraterrestrial hypothesis.

Kevin Randle is a well-known figure in ufology, a firm believer that aliens met their deaths at Roswell, New Mexico, in the summer of 1947, and the author or co-author of several books on the most famous UFO case. He's also someone – unlike many in the field – possessed of a fine sense of humour and a capacity to talk about things other than UFOs and alien life. Yes, really!

No doubt, there were many who thought that Randle was going to reel off case after case in support of the notion that ET has had the misfortune to crash and burn on dozens of occasions. Well, it didn't quite go like that. Randle may be a champion of Roswell, but there are other well-known cases for which he has no time at all. His paper was focused to a great extent on the UFO 'crash-retrieval' investigations of Leonard H Stringfield, who wrote a number of reports on the subject and who died in 1994. Randle was careful to note that he considered Stringfield to be "an honourable man", but he had major reservations about some of the cases that Stringfield highlighted and published.

Of a UFO crash said to have occurred in Mexico in 1948 or 1950, depending on whom you ask, and to which Stringfield gave much space in his reports, Randle noted that, after having delved deeply into the story for himself: "We now have what I believe to be a solid answer for this case – which is, simply, it didn't happen. Len started this process by publishing his information about it and I ended it for him." Ouch.

Randle also cut down the story of a UFO crash in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, in 1941 – a tale that has been repeated in numerous publications, including those of Stringfield: "The problem for me is simply this: if there had been this crash in 1941, then the military would have been aware of the possibility of interplanetary travel. That means they would have been better prepared for the Roswell crash. That argues against the extraterrestrial nature of this case." That was two down. And there were several more to go, including the famous story of a reported UFO crash at the Norwegian island of Spitzbergen in 1952. Randle's



NICK REDFERN

ABOVE: Kevin Randle revealed a sense of humour and a willingness to talk about subjects other than ufology. He believes in the truth of the Roswell event, but is prepared to criticise other 'classic' cases – even in front of a MUFON audience.

BELOW: The crowd mingles at the MUFON conference.

Randle is prepared to dismiss many famous cases

verdict: nothing but a hoax.

I asked one crystal-carrying audience member, who was leafing through the Symposium Proceedings, what she thought of Randle's revelations: "Well, I like his Roswell research," she replied, somewhat icily – a sure sign that being told some long-celebrated crashed UFO events simply didn't occur was clearly not what she wanted to hear at all.

Stanton Friedman, a near-permanent and undeniably legendary fixture on the UFO lecture circuit, was on hand to deliver a powerful presentation that castigated certain well-known figures. Friedman's paper began: "In the first six months of 2010 there was a comparatively huge amount of serious media coverage about aliens and life in outer space. The coverage was the result of many different comments by a number of very high profile scientists such as world famous theoretical astrophysicist Dr Stephen Hawking, astronomers such as Dr Frank Drake, Dr Paul Davies, Lord Martin Rees, [and] Dr Seth Shostak."

Friedman couldn't let it pass with respect to the above: "There were a number of dismissive remarks about UFOs, but no sensible discussion concerning the extensive evidence that Earth is being visited by extraterrestrials."

Thus, it was time for Stan to redress the balance, which he did time and again: "There is no doubt that the fine minds in astrophysics have really fouled up when it comes to educating the public and the media, and themselves, about life in outer space. They have not had the courage to dig into the mountain of evidence available nor confront the realistic consequences of their claims."

As he reached the finish-line, Friedman brought it all back home, addressing his audience on a matter close to their hearts: "One reason they have been getting away with this nonsense is our failure to hold their feet to the fire of reason to show that the emperors have no clothes and to put the facts out in the open."

Also on hand were Linda Howe and John Burroughs: the former is well-known within ufology for her extensive writings on the cattle-mutilation controversy; Burroughs, meanwhile, was one of the key US Air Force players in the December 1980 encounters with – well, something – at Rendlesham Forest, Suffolk. Their joint presentation offered a new slant on the affair; one which had far less to do with aliens, and much more to do with time-travellers from our distant future who, on that fateful night in the woods, may have come back as part of some vital mission to prevent the future extinction of the Human Race. Apparently, things aren't looking too good for us in the centuries ahead. Which apparently explains why what's left of us is hell-bent on coming back and securing some good old 20th- and 21st-century DNA, eggs and sperm to beef-up the dwindling species.

Howe asked the mind-boggling questions: "If we humans became conscious of the time manipulation efforts, would our consciousness change the future to survival or to extinction? Does the UFO phenomenon keep us dumb and blind to prevent our interference in their efforts to unravel past, present and future?" Buggered if I know!

As for my own presentation on Crop Circles, I wondered how an American audience would react to a presentation that suggested a large number of British circles were not the handiwork of black-eyed, emotionless midgets from beyond the Solar System, but the products of skilled artists of a very human kind. Surprisingly, there was a total lack of animosity and hostility to what I had to say, particularly when I succeeded in getting across the message that labelling these people as mere 'hoaxers' is to totally misunderstand what drives and motivates them to do the things they do.

On the matter of MUFON's field-investigations and online files, Terry Groff, a MUFON Deputy Director of Investigations, gave a workshop presentation on the organisation's Case Management System, which is designed to allow efficient access to the latest sighting reports, case studies, and ongoing investigations. As Groff noted, teaching field investigators not just how to investigate reports, but the process by which their data need to be carefully prepared and electronically archived, is a vital component of MUFON's activities in the Internet age.

Other presentations included those of Michael Schratt, who dazzled the audience with stories and imagery of advanced military aircraft that might very well be mistaken for UFOs; John Greenewald, keeper of The Black Vault website, who delved into the world of Freedom of Information, official secrecy, and Project Blue Book; George Filer, who spoke about his own UFO encounter while serving with the US military in 1962; Kathleen F Marden, the niece of none other than Betty Hill, who argued that some abduction cases continued to defy easy explanation; and Marc D'Antonio, whose presentation was entitled "Drawn in Stone: Cosmic Hints of the Petroglyphs".

When it was all over that sunny Sunday afternoon – the stage dismantled, the vendors packed up – I sat down with a cold Heineken, chatted with a group who were engaged in a deep and dark discussion of the Men in Black, and wondered if Disclosure really was right around the corner. Or would we all be back next year for more of the same? **FT**

NICK REDFERN

NICK REDFERN is a frequent contributor to *Fortean Times*. His latest book is *Memoirs of a Monster Hunter*. He can be contacted at his website: www.nickredfern.com.

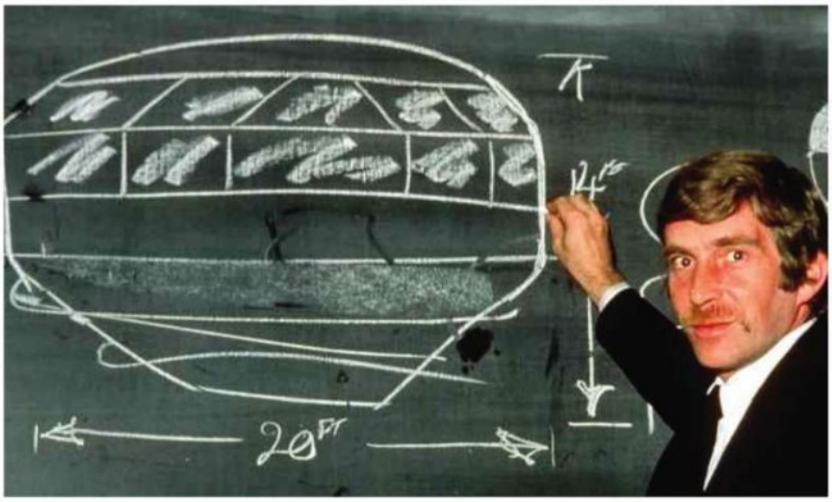
Last issue, **PETER BROOKESMITH**, **DAVID CLARKE** and **ANDY ROBERTS** revisited one of the most famous British close encounters, the PC Alan Godfrey 'abduction'. In the concluding part of their anniversary article, they ask what PC Godfrey really saw on that night in 1980. Illustration by **FLORENT CALVEZ**.

Let's rewind to Alan Godfrey's initial experience on Burnley Road. What did he see, and what made him think it was a UFO?

Jenny Randles believes there is a strong case for his seeing an unidentified atmospheric phenomenon (UAP) – a catch-all term for a range of light phenomena that includes earthlights, ball lightning, and atmospheric plasmas and vortices similar to those proposed by Terence Meaden as the source for some crop circles. There have been literally thousands of sightings of this type of UAP reported in the Pennine region between Yorkshire and Lancashire: the area has been dubbed "UFO Alley". Reports describe nocturnal lights that dance around, split apart, merge, and sometimes emerge from or disappear into the ground.

An analysis of 10,278 UFO sightings between 1947 and 2001 shows that, as a ratio of population against sighting numbers, sightings are 12 times more frequent within this sparsely settled region than the national average. Cases with reported physical effects average 2.8 per cent but rise to 10.1 per cent in this area; and 73 per cent of all alien contact reports within the Pennines occurred within 10 miles (16km) of Todmorden. There was a major build-up of sightings during 1979 and 1980. Godfrey's experience occurred at the height of an intense UFO flap that included two other independently reported 'alien encounters' on the road to Burnley. And Godfrey's experience and others from the Pennine region have features in common:

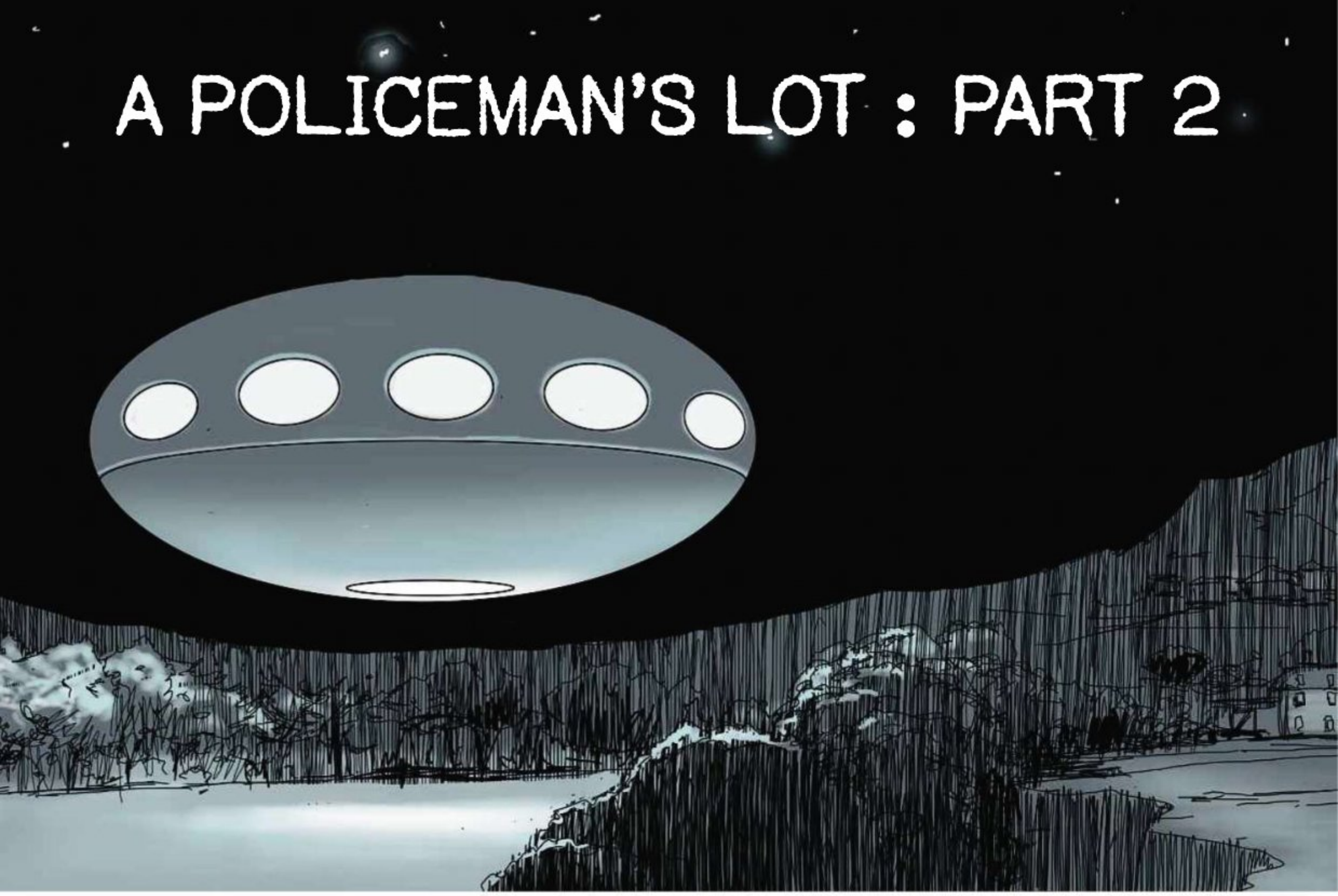
- Electrical disturbances – as in the interference on Godfrey's UHF and VHF radios when the UFO was present. This is highly suggestive of unusual atmospheric ionisation known to be associated with UAPs.
- The appearance of the UFO just after a low-pressure frontal weather system had cleared the area. Such meteorological conditions have been identified as a trigger for the creation of spin-off atmospheric vortices. Godfrey described the leaves shaking



TOPFOTO / FORTEAN PICTURE LIBRARY / BORD

ABOVE: PC Godfrey describes the unexplained object he saw while on patrol in Todmorden, West Yorkshire. **FACING PAGE:** Police report of a sighting of strange lights in the sky in the nearby town of Halifax.

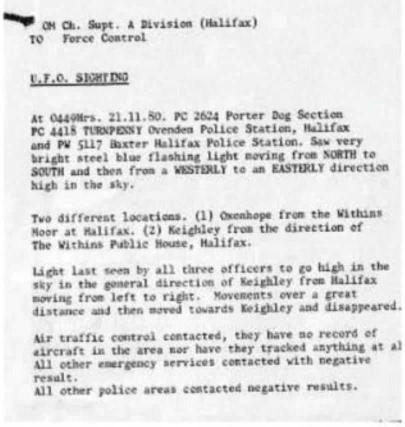
A POLICEMAN'S LOT : PART 2



on nearby trees as the object hovered, rotating. Later he found a dry, swirled pattern on the road surface. This is consistent with the transient traces left by a rotating vortex. In other cases, these have left traces in hay, grass, snow and sand.

- Godfrey described the UFO as a like a glowing, spinning top. He also described a series of dark blotches on it, which he interpreted as windows. This is a common feature of reports of rotating funnel vortices. Similar descriptions can be found in some 200 other cases turned up by Randles's crop circle research.
- Finally we have the (admittedly controversial) theories of Dr Michael Persinger and Paul Devereux. These suggest that some people, who are more susceptible to the effects of ionisation and other energy fields, might experience 'missing time' and spatial relocation in close proximity to a UAP. Only a few people – in the right place at the right time, or who got closest to the UAP – would experience a full-blown altered state of consciousness that might be perceived as an 'alien contact experience'.[1]

Andy Roberts, on the other hand, argues that Godfrey may well be reporting his own experience, but that it is unlikely to have taken place in our consensus reality – for the following reasons. First, there is no physical evidence that what Godfrey described took place at all. Second, it was well publicised, and has since featured in numerous books, magazines and TV documentaries. Yet no other witness to any part of it has come forward.[2]



[redacted] OM Ch. Supt. A Division (Halifax)
TO Force Control

U.F.O. SIGHTING

At 0440Hrs. 21.11.80. PC 2624 Porter Dog Section PC 4418 TURNPENNY Ovenden Police Station, Halifax and PW 5117 Baxter Halifax Police Station. Saw very bright steel blue flashing light moving from NORTH to SOUTH and then from a WESTERLY to an EASTERLY direction high in the sky.

Two different locations. (1) Oxenhope from the Withins Moor at Halifax. (2) Keighley from the direction of The Withins Public House, Halifax.

Light last seen by all three officers to go high in the sky in the general direction of Keighley from Halifax moving from left to right. Movements over a great distance and then moved towards Keighley and disappeared.

Air traffic control contacted, they have no record of aircraft in the area nor have they tracked anything at al
All other emergency services contacted with negative result.
All other police areas contacted negative results.

This seems odd, as the event took place on one of the main Yorkshire-to-Lancashire trans-Pennine routes. Also, in 1980, the main road from Todmorden to Burnley was lined with mills and houses. The mills in those days worked 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and there would have been workers going to and coming from their 6:00am shift-changes at mills in East Lancashire and West Yorkshire, by car, on foot and by bus. Not to mention early morning market traders and others setting off from or going to their day's work. It's reasonable to suggest, although not certain, that some human being would have passed that spot at the time Godfrey was there. Yet no one reported seeing a huge hovering UFO, nor did anyone report, in the wake of the national and local publicity about the case, seeing a UFO and/or Godfrey on Burnley Road at the time.

As mentioned previously, Godfrey was encouraged to make an official report when he was told about another sighting by three Halifax police officers that same night (28/29 November). They saw "a very bright steel blue flashing light" moving north-to-south high in the sky over the moors. They saw this strange light two or three times as it zoomed around the sky at close range. This reportedly occurred about 15 minutes before Godfrey's encounter, and was all the more significant in that the light was last seen disappearing in the direction of Todmorden. That's how the story was told in the local paper at the time, and subsequently in all other accounts of the case.

But if one looks carefully at the report sent to the Ministry of Defence by West Yorkshire Police (which can be seen in an MOD file released at the UK National Archives in 2007), one notices the date given is 21 November 1980 – approximately one week earlier than Godfrey's sighting. Could this simply be a typo? No. Because the Halifax officers' report was attached to a forwarding letter from West Yorkshire Police HQ, which is clearly dated 24 November 1980 – four days before Godfrey's report. This demolishes one of the key claims made about Godfrey's story – that it was corroborated by the sighting by the three Halifax constables on the same night.

BACK TO THE FUTURO

Nonetheless, let's consider the possibility that things happened as Godfrey said they did, and he did see a large object that appeared to hover a few feet above the road. What could have caused it? It could have been a large, metallic UFO that no one else saw. But currently there is no evidence that could prove or disprove whether or not this is what actually took place. Perhaps, then, what he drew and described couldn't be seen by others because it took place entirely in his mind. That's an equally unprovable contention – unless there is some form of stimulus that might explain his experience. Godfrey has stated repeatedly that when he saw the object his first thought was that it was a bus. Indeed, when Godfrey was hypnotically regressed his first words on encountering the UFO were: "It's a bus. (Pause) It's not a bus."

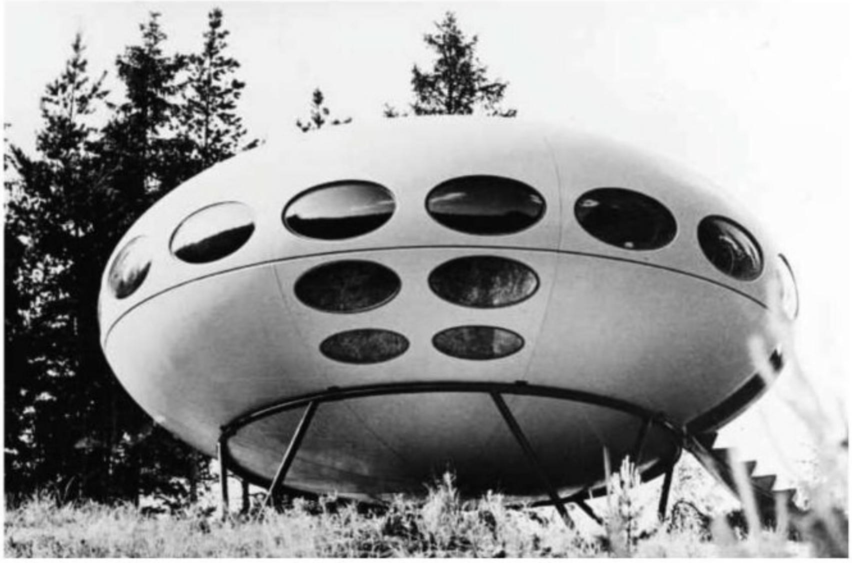
Why did Godfrey think a UFO was a bus – or, perhaps more to the point, why did he think a bus was a UFO? Consider this: Godfrey has been up all night. It's the latter part of his shift and he's been unsuccessfully hunting cows up and down the backstreets of Todmorden. He's driving up Burnley Road, tired, through a light drizzle. Suddenly he sees something at a bus stop opposite the Mons Mill. Whatever it is, by his own account, it reflected the headlights of his police car. He can't immediately recognise the object but thinks it's a bus. As his tired, perhaps confused, mind processes this information, he slips into an altered state of consciousness (ASC), and in this hallucinatory state, voilà, the bus becomes a UFO. The ASC lasts long enough for him to test his radios, sketch the object, and drive his car 100 yards (90m) or more up the road before he comes round.

But why would he misinterpret a bus as a UFO, and why did he draw the particular shape he did? Consider what he did draw – it's quite different from the configuration of UFOs that people usually describe; we don't know of any other UFO image quite like Godfrey's.

So if he did misperceive a mundane object such as a bus and slipped into an ASC in which the bus became a UFO, where did he get his imagery from?

Perhaps it came from a prefabricated, plastic building called the Futuro (above). He would have seen the Futuro house in Todmorden, almost every day of his life – some days many times – over a 12-year period. For the building was parked at the side of Burnley Road, in a number of locations between 1969 and the early 1980s. Initially, it was used as an information centre, when it was situated just a few hundred yards from Todmorden police station. Latterly it sat outside a factory on Burnley Road.

It is possible then that the following took place: Godfrey sees a bus parked at the stop on Burnley Road, and slips into an ASC thinking he has seen a UFO, whose appearance is created from stored mental images of the Futuro house. People could have driven or walked past him while this was happening: all they would have seen was a bus, and a police car parked nearby, with a policeman in the driver's seat. Hence no one would report anything out of the ordinary and probably wouldn't connect what they had seen with the Godfrey UFO story when it broke in the press.



GETTY IMAGES / KEYSTONE

ABOVE: The Futuro had served as an information centre, then moved to other positions from 1969 to the 80s.

The plastic Futuro building had been parked in a number of locations around Burnley Road

It seems unlikely that we will ever resolve precisely what happened to Alan Godfrey. But, if he didn't make his experience up or simply dream it, there has to be an explanation. The bus-and-ASC hypothesis is the simplest and most elegant explanation available, and it accounts for all the elements of his story. The shaking leaves, in this scenario, were disturbed by a large vehicle's exhaust; the dry patch and swirled pattern on the road were produced by a combination of heat from the exhaust and the vehicle sheltering the road from the rain for a while.[3]

ALTERED STATES

Even if we accept the likelihood of an ASC, this is not an entirely straightforward hypothesis. 'Altered state of consciousness' is a portmanteau term for experiences with a variety of causes and effects. What happens is that one dissociates from one's normal sense of self, and/or that sense of self dissociates itself from one's physical body. One may, as in an out-of-body experience, seem to separate from the physical self, even be able to watch it (it may be asleep, or awake; inert, or highly active). One may temporarily lose all consciousness (so entailing loss of memory) of what one's body is doing, as some people do during epileptic fits. One may experience a blissful oneness with God, as mystics report, or enter a mental realm of dream-like narrative, which possibly best describes accounts of shamanic journeys and other visionary experiences. While trauma, exhaustion or sleep disturbance, intensely monotonous activity or frenzied activity or hyper-awareness or extreme boredom can trigger an ASC, the literature supports the idea that sensory numbness or relentless repetitive rhythms or exhaustion, or a combination of these factors, are nearly always involved. There's also some evidence that plasma-like electromagnetic phenomena (earthlights and such, or UAPs) can induce an ASC.

Some things can be said unequivocally in favour of Alan Godfrey having slipped into an ASC of some kind. Perhaps the most telling is that he is known to have had hallucinatory experiences and episodes of missing time before. This should be emphasised – that, first, anyone can hallucinate (doing so is not a sign of mental pathology) and, second, that a hallucination is indistinguishable from reality, and forms memories that seem to be veridical. Godfrey's first experience occurred in childhood, when "a ball of light 'like the earth rushing towards him' had appeared in his bedroom".[4] Then, in 1965, aged about 18, he was driving home with his girlfriend at about 2am when, suddenly, "a woman with a dog seemed to step out in front of them. Alan hit the brakes and yelled out, 'Bloody hell! I think I've run over her.' … [He] stopped and got out. There was nothing to see. Badly shaken, the pair drove home, to discover that two hours of time had vanished as mysteriously as the phantom figure." This story closely follows other 'road ghost' tales known to folklorists.

About five years after this, Godfrey was in a park walking his brother's dog, which suddenly ran off. "Alan thought he could make out a form in the bushes; it turned out to be a friend." When he didn't return home with the dog, Godfrey's brother went looking for him and found him wandering alone in a daze. He seemed to remember talking with his friend. But the man in question had died some months previously.[5] These last two instances are particularly pertinent because they follow the same pattern as the Todmorden experience: a gross misperception of an object of some kind, which proved so surprising it induced a trance-like state, in which either no distinct memory, or a false one, registered.

EXPLANATIONS

We can but speculate about what else may have made Godfrey vulnerable to slipping into an ASC on this occasion. He was working the night shift, a disruption of normal diurnal rhythms, and may have been awake for many hours longer than normal. He was also probably debilitated by long-term physical distress due to injuries sustained in an assault while on duty, and consequent surgery, some months before. A combination of disturbed sleep patterns and chronic weariness from pain would have made him particularly susceptible to an ASC; his confusion at seeing the 'UFO' may have been the final trigger.

Alternatively, he may have had a seizure ('fit') of some kind (see pp54–55); if this was a solitary episode of the kind that strikes one in five people in a lifetime, there is no way of knowing what kind of seizure it was. Tests for epilepsy conducted later by police-approved doctors proved negative, but we don't know what those tests were, or how thorough they were compared to modern techniques. We note that an epileptic seizure (a sudden disruption of communications among neurons in the brain), like other ASCs, may begin with a "burst of light" as Godfrey reported; and during a petit mal fit some people are capable both of being 'unconscious' and of performing complex self-preserving acts in a potentially lethal environment.[6] Godfrey's later competing memories suggest that his brain was desperate to fill a gap in his consciousness and was flitting between alternative possibilities, as brains do.

The other difficulty with the ASC hypothesis is that there was clearly some delay before it took full effect. Some major shift of perception seems to have occurred between Godfrey's first thinking he was seeing a bus (it was perhaps another large vehicle), then seeing what is so startlingly like a local landmark, the Futuro house; we interpret this 'vision' as a projection of memorial material in a liminal state of consciousness. At this stage, Godfrey was apparently still able consciously to stop his car and make a sketch of the 'UFO' before losing touch completely with normal awareness. It would appear that this ASC fully kicked in only with the burst of light and his hearing a voice saying "This is not for your eyes" – which he described as not exactly an external voice but "very much like his own thinking voice", inside his head, speaking in an unusual monotone – and subsequent loss of consciousness.

This is at least redolent of a 'complex-partial' epileptic seizure, which starts in one hemisphere of the brain, often in the temporal lobe. It may spread to areas that govern consciousness, and may involve visual, auditory and/or olfactory hallucinations. Complete loss of consciousness may follow, particularly if the seizure spreads to both brain hemispheres.[7] Whether or not such a movement through different stages (or levels) within a single episode of a non-epileptic ASC is relatively common has (so far) proved difficult to establish. That there are different levels or kinds of ASC is not at issue: there are recognised 'depths' of hypnotic trance, for instance, while both meditators and users of hallucinogens report experiencing distinct levels of altered awareness, which seasoned meditators can reach at will. There has also been some academic discussion of the characteristics of progressive stages in shamanic (induced) trance.[8]

There are, of course, other interpretations of Godfrey's account. One is that he made it up to explain being out of radio contact (we have only his word that both his radios failed to function), for whatever reason. Perhaps he fell asleep. Perhaps he fell asleep and dreamed the whole thing; sleep, after all, is an altered state of consciousness, and one enters it in stages. It is also possible, if unprovable, that Godfrey is misremembering the order of events. He may have been discombobulated by the 'UFO', gone straight into an ASC, regained normal consciousness a bit further up the road, and then tried his radios and made his sketch. One may speculate that he then constructed, *post hoc*, a logical sequence of events from random, fragmentary memories of experience. This 'rational' version resolves any problem of conflicting memories (although we know these persisted) and shows Godfrey following something like proper police procedure. Through processes well known to psychologists,[9] this reconstruction would then become the dominant, actually false but seemingly real, memory – the story Godfrey has soberly repeated all these years.

So, all in all, even if our re-examination of the case so far suggests that the UK's most renowned 'abduction' was largely the creation of ufologists, it also shows how a relatively ordinary event can become an extraordinary one, given the right person in the right place at the right time. Nonetheless, as with all the best forteana, many questions remain unanswered, and some perhaps remain unanswerable. FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

PETER BROOKESMITH, **DAVID CLARKE** and **ANDY ROBERTS** have all contributed regularly to *FT* on ufology and other topics for many years. Peter is currently involved in publishing and re-issuing quality fiction. David is head of the journalism department at Sheffield Hallam University and a consultant to the National Archives. Andy is a senior manager for a Housing Association.

NOTES

[1] Others in this *ad hoc* research group felt that the plasma-vortex hypothesis was too exotic to be given a high probability rating; and specifically that a 20ft (6m)-wide, 14ft (4m)-high PV was unprecedentedly large, while its energy source remains problematic for one that lasted long enough for PC Godfrey to sketch it. It was also noted that Terence Meaden's conclusions regarding plasma vortices (reached in an attempt to explain complex crop circles, all of which turned out to be man-made) has largely been discredited. See http://tinyurl.com/2vxhj7t (xstreamscience.org), section 7ff, for a discussion of the relevant problems. Plasma vortices form in high-atmosphere auroræ because extremely low pressures there allow them to, and self-sustaining plasmas form only as part of a large weather system. Former MoD scientist Rodney Ashby (telephone conversations with Peter Brookesmith, 12 Feb, 22 Feb 2009) calculated that at ground-level atmospheric pressure an electrically driven plasma of such size and duration would require millions of amps in energy to sustain it, which raises the question of whence that energy could have come: the object Godfrey saw was too small to create an electrical discharge without an external energy source. He also observed that any plasma of such size would have been as bright as an oxyacetylene torch, not a blotchily glowing 'object' with tolerably bright light coming only from underneath it, and would be functioning at comparable temperatures (3200–3500°C). The resulting level of radiant heat would have scorched everything for tens of yards around it – a rather more dramatic side-effect than a small dry patch on the tarmac – and would have destroyed nearby vegetation and probably burnt Godfrey's patrol car 100ft (30m) away. A plasma could be formed by a release of nuclear radiation but would have a distinctive coloration, wouldn't form a vortex, and would also require an energy source, which would have left radiation traces. He also concluded that if Godfrey saw what he said he did, it wasn't a plasma vortex: a plasma would not reflect a car's headlights, as Godfrey said the 'UFO' did, and would show an even distribution of light. The shape was wrong for a vortex, which takes the drawn-out form of a tornado, and would also have a uniform, not blotchy surface. This is not entirely to dismiss the possibility that Godfrey saw an unidentified atmospheric phenomenon of some kind, although the hypothesis does involve replacing one unknown with another.

[2] A Mr Lionel Smith, school caretaker and special constable, has been cited by Alan Godfrey in corroboration (email to Andy Roberts, 14 Nov 2008). Mr Smith is quoted at http://tinyurl.com/332cjld (legjoints.com) as saying: "When I came round the corner to check the grounds, I looked up in the sky and this – UFO – was up in the sky, approximately over the area where, I later learned, Alan Godfrey had his experience – I didn't know at the time – and the object shot across the valley four times – backwards and forwards – and it vanished over the hills." It seems highly unlikely he was checking the school grounds at 5:00am on a Saturday. Another version of Mr Smith's testimony (Jenny Randles: *The Pennine UFO Mystery*, Granada, 1983, p129) has him seeing this light "about 12 hours" after Godfrey's encounter: Mr Smith "was opening the boiler room preparing for a club session to be held that evening when he saw a bright light down in the valley below. This moved along the valley and then shot into the sky. The school overlooks the spot where Alan Godfrey had his encounter."

[3] A contributor with a weakness for equines has suggested that the vehicle was a motorised horsebox (some models do sport black windows set high), or at any rate a panelled, rigid (not artic) truck. But the essence of this variation is that the driver was perhaps lost or had overshot his destination, and had stopped – possibly to read a map and/or perform a several-point turn – for long enough to create the dry, patterned patch on the road as well as disturb leaves on the shrubbery with the exhaust.

[4] Quotations are from Jenny Randles, pers. comm., 25 July 2008. We might note here that during hypnosis the 'Yosef' figure asked if Godfrey remembered him; Godfrey associated the figure with these earlier episodes. While conscious, he also remarked, in surprise: "They have come for me before", and added, "They will be coming for me again – in 10 years' time." As far as we know, they didn't.

[5] Randles: *op. cit.* (1983), pp216–7. Godfrey seems to have had a continuing relationship with immaterial dogs. Randles notes (p217): "When he and his wife were courting. she had seen a black labrador in Alan's house. It had licked her and then ran upstairs. 'I didn't know you had a dog,' she told him later, describing it. He did not have one. The dog concerned had died two years earlier."

[6] One of us knows a long-term sufferer from petit mal who in the early 1990s had a seizure while cycling from home (Boar's Hill) north toward Headington on the A4142 Oxford Ring Road. She blanked out; when she recovered consciousness some 20 minutes later, she was on foot, pushing her bicycle south, on the other side of this extremely busy artery. She had no memory of anything at all for the intervening period.

[7] See: http://tinyurl.com/34tu59p (epilepsyclassroom.com) for a brief overview of the mechanics of the spectrum of epileptic seizures.

[8] See, for example, J Francis Thackeray: "Trance, art and literature: testing for hallucinogens", Antiquity 79:303, Mar 2005, citing JD Lewis-Williams & TA Dowson: "The signs of all times: entoptic phenomena in Upper Palæolithic art", *Current Anthropology* 29:201–45, 1988; and see also http://tinyurl.com/2wjtn9n (www.bradshawfoundation.com/latest-bozeman.html).

[9] For a survey of relevant research, see CC French: "Fantastic memories: The relevance of research into eyewitness testimony and false memories for reports of anomalous experiences", *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 10, 153–174, 2003.

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forum

The Victorian shaman

Dickens's 'A Christmas Carol' continues to enchant audiences even today – but why? GUY REID-BROWN argues that the ever-popular tale has more to offer than just seasonal sentiment...

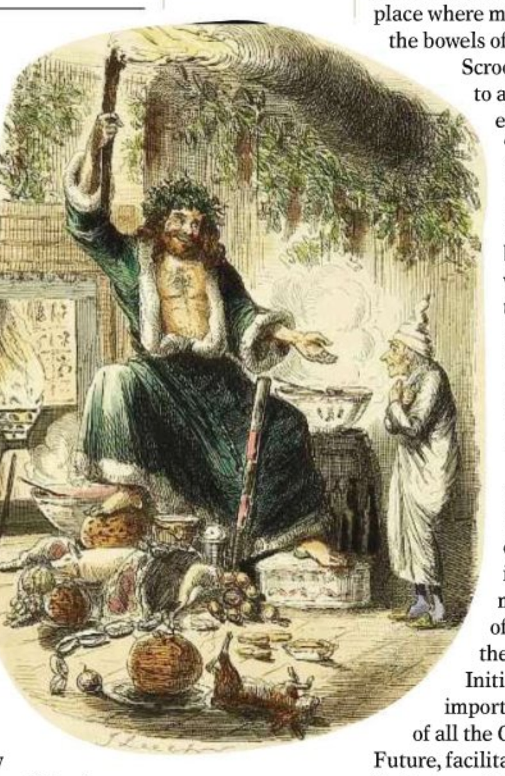
GUY REID-BROWN is probably the only Kent-based Reiki Master and Healer who resides in a Victorian Churchyard intersected by leys. www.greidbrown.me.uk.

No doubt as this Advent commences, I, and many others, will be re-reading Charles Dickens's 1843 seasonal classic "A Christmas Carol" for the umpteenth time. Those of us who have fallen under its spell will doubtless continue to do so every year, even if we live to be as old as the oldest Biblical patriarch, and each time with the same degree of emotion – whether it be delight, wonder or sadness – as the times before.

In any other context, such behaviour might be interpreted as borderline obsessive, but that simply doesn't apply here. Ponder this for a moment: there are few other works in Western literature that have enjoyed such a breadth and variety of adaptations across all media. The tale continually reinvents itself, the same and yet different; yet by any reasonable measure the work is slim, compact – by Dickens's own expansive standards positively Lilliputian. So what is its secret?

It was only a short while ago, after completing and contemplating Patrick Harpur's alchemical masterpiece *The Philosopher's Secret Fire*,[1] that I grasped consciously what my unconscious (or higher self; call it what you will), had presumably known all along – that Dickens, an unwitting Victorian shaman, had created a 'hermetically' compact yet multifaceted transformative initiation myth for our times. All other cultures and periods, from the Eleusinian Greeks to the Dreamtime Aborigines, needed and originated such myths, and Dickens has done the same for us.

The creation of the story was a cathartic reaction to a mounting crisis – gruelling financial problems and the relative flop of the ongoing *Martin Chuzzlewhit* ("I don't think I can write," bemoaned Dickens) – that gave way to the thrall of imaginative ecstasy as Dickens created his tale: "He wept at it, and laughed, and wept again; it so excited him that, in the small hours, 'when all sober folks had gone to bed', he walked London's black streets for 15 and 20 miles, possessed by it"[2]



The paradoxical core of all Initiation is the dying to oneself in order to be reborn, and Scrooge's story occurs, entirely appropriately, at that ancient and emblematic time of death and rebirth, the Winter Solstice. His psychopomp, that escort and guide to the Underworld, the necessary Prime Initiator, is of course old Jacob Marley himself, Scrooge's own dear departed.

The transcendence of time and space is likewise an intrinsic part of all transformative initiations, and Scrooge experiences not merely three nights in one, but all Christmases past, present and future, in a journey that takes him through all four Elements; his initial descent into the Underworld is also an ascent into an "air filled with phantoms, wondering hither and thither in restless haste".

The Dionysian aspect of Scrooge's initiation commences as he lies frightened in bed "the very core and centre of a blaze of ruddy light", which transpires to emanate from Scrooge's "own room", which has itself undergone a complete transformation into a festive, greenery-bedecked arbour illuminated by "a mighty blaze... roaring up the chimney", the centrepiece of which is a heaped-up throne of Yuletide fare, on top of which the jovial Ghost of Christmas Present (below) sits like "a jolly giant bearing a glowing torch, in shape not unlike plenty's horn". This spirit accompanies him from the urban haunts of man "to a bleak and desert moor where monstrous masses of stone were cast about... A place where miners live who labour in the bowels of the earth".

Scrooge barely has time to assimilate this earthly element before he is sped "To sea. To Scrooge's horror, looking back, he saw the last of the land, a frightful range of rocks, behind them; and his ears were deafened by the thundering of water, as it rolled, and roared, and raged among the dreadful caverns it had worn, and fiercely tried to undermine the earth."

There is a great deal more that I could write, but which you can work out for yourself, concerning the initiatory and mythological resonances of this tale, but ultimately, the most terrible part of Initiation is always the most important – and the most terrible of all the Ghosts, that of Christmas Future, facilitates the final breakthrough for Scrooge. Ebenezer's newfound insight indicates that he has finally merited this: "'Ghost of the Future!' he exclaimed, 'I fear you more than any spectre I have seen. But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart.'"

And so, at the prompting of this last awful spirit, Scrooge undergoes his own literal and metaphorical death: "Scrooge crept towards it, trembling as he went; and following the finger, read upon the stone of the neglected grave his own name, EBENEZER SCROOGE."

In this way, Scrooge wins through to Christmas Morning, exclaiming: "I don't know what day of the month it is... I don't know how long I've been among the Spirits. I don't know anything. I'm quite a baby. Never mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a baby. Hallo! Whoop! Hallo here."

And so the Day begins... FT

Notes

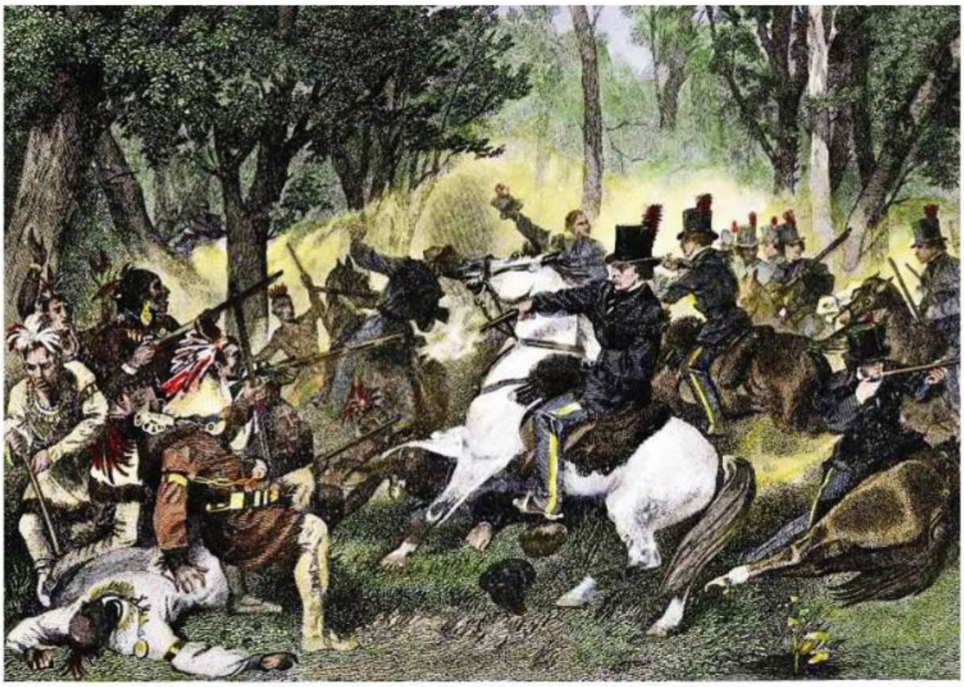
[1] Patrick Harpur: *The Philosophers' Secret Fire. A History of the Imagination*, Penguin, 2002.

[2] Eleanor Farjeon: Introduction, *Christmas Books* (New Oxford Illustrated Dickens), Oxford University Press, reissue edition 1954. All subsequent quotations are from "A Christmas Carol".

A plague on your White House

NICK PARKINS ponders the tale of Tecumseh's Curse, which some say has seen any US President elected in a year ending in '0' die in office.

NICK PARKINS is a freelance writer and researcher with a background in philosophy, whose work appears in print and web-based publications.



ALAMY

ABOVE: The Battle of the Thames, 1812, where Tecumseh was killed. One version of the story has his half-brother issuing the curse following this event.

FACING, TOP LEFT: Half-brother Tenskwatawa was less accomplished as a military leader.

FACING, CENTRE: Presidents killed by the "curse":

William Harrison

Abraham Lincoln

James Garfield

William McKinley

Warren Harding

Franklin Roosevelt

John Kennedy

George W Bush is a fortunate man. Not only did he dodge the slings, grenades and occasional footwear of outrage and scorn during his presidential twin-term in office, but, some say, a pre-destined arrow exacting an ancient Indian thirst for revenge…

In the newly formed land of the free, democracy was in its first throes of infancy. One of its many defining tantrums, the quaintly named 'Battle of Tippecanoe', saw charismatic Shawnee chieftain Tecumseh take on the first governor of the Indiana Territories, William H Harrison – and not for the first time.

The previous year, they had failed to see eye to eye over the sale of land agreed by the Miami Indians under the Fort Wayne treaty. Tecumseh didn't buy this latest concession. He believed that the Indian nation was as one and that no single tribe had the right to sell land without approval from its peers. Harrison, on the other hand – like a seasoned real-estate developer running for office – saw it as his inalienable democratic duty to shake hands with all prospective allies among the native indigenous peoples. His refusal to relent on the treaty forced Tecumseh to seek support among various tribal factions. The military esteem in which Tecumseh was held proved the catalyst for his eventual undoing and what, some claim, was his subsequent and long-lasting revenge. His reputation went before him as he gathered followers, supported by a widely held belief in the word of his half-brother, the 'prophet', Tenskwatawa.

By 1808, Tecumseh, his brother and their followers had taken up residence in Prophetstown, near the Tippecanoe River in the Indiana Territory. In the three years leading up to the battle of 1811, their numbers had swollen, provoking white settlers in the region, fearing for their safety, to demand that the government take action.

On any other day, Harrison's response might have played into Tecumseh's hands. Tecumseh, after all, was a master warrior and a brilliant tactician. Unfortunately for the hopes of native resistance, Harrison's decision to move within probing distance of Prophetstown was taken at a time when Tecumseh himself was away canvassing support for his growing alliance.

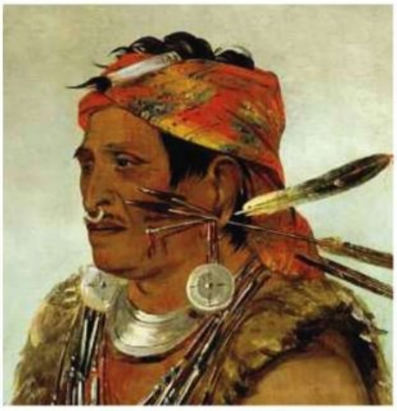
The wrathful chieftain uttered a dire prophecy

In his absence, Tenskwatawa, lacking his brother's military nous and composure under the prospect of fire, blinked first. His authority to act, he claimed, came from the divine creator, the 'Master of Life', who would ensure that his people would prevail and that the white bullets would not dent their ambition. In fact, they suffered an ignominious defeat and a large number of casualties, and were driven from their settlement, which Harrison had burnt to the ground.

Tenskwatawa's awakening had cost untold lives. Tecumseh returned to find his prospects, like Prophetstown, all but in ruins. Having allied himself so closely with his discredited brother, his aura and mandate to lead was broken. Legend tells that the wrathful chieftain now uttered a dire prophetic forewarning:

"Harrison will not win this year to be the Great Chief. But he may win next year. If he does… He will not finish his term. He will die in his office. You think that I have lost my powers. I who caused the Sun to darken and Red Men to give up firewater… I tell you Harrison will die. And after him every Great Chief chosen every 20 years thereafter will die. And when each one dies, let everyone remember the death of our people."

Perhaps not surprisingly, accounts of the curse's origin conflict. Some say it was born out of the defeat at Tippecanoe; others claim that it was some time later, and that under the shadow of



Tecumseh's death the following year at the Battle of the Thames, it was Tenskwatawa who uttered the fateful words. The confusion doesn't end there. Some say the curse is simply nonsense and that no records exist that support the existence of such a native Indian jinx. What is not in doubt is that the sinister malediction came to pass.

Sure enough, William H Harrison was elected ninth President of the United States in 1840; his inaugural address as president on 4 March 1841 first saw Death cast his shadow over the White House lawn. Harrison, the hardy military man, would later lay claim to the longest inauguration speech in American history, delivering his address on a shivering, wet, late winter's day without a coat, hat or care for the cold. Soon after, he fell ill. His might have been the longest speech, but it turned out to be the shortest presidency: 31 days into his term, Harrison was dead.

Talk of revenge as a dish best served cold was superstitious nonsense. Harrison was a proud, stubborn man of good age, taken off by a chill wind and the cold hand of time. Pneumonia was the cause of death. There was nothing supernatural about it, surely?

Next to fall while in office was Zachary Taylor. If the curse were to be taken at its word, one would rightly expect Taylor, who became President in 1849, just eight years after Harrison, to be safe from its effect. But he was an exception to the rule – perhaps because he and Tecumseh had history. It was Taylor who, in the War of 1812, defended Fort Harrison from Tecumseh and the Shawnee; his involvement in defeating the Native Americans apparently led to death from gastroenteritis.

Normal service resumed in 1865 when a shot rang out and the icy hand returned to grip President Lincoln, one year into his second term in office. Lincoln had been elected in 1860. Thereafter, the fallen made for unnerving reading: 1880, Garfield (dies 1881: assassin's bullet); 1900, McKinley (for second term) (dies 1901: assassin's bullet); 1920, Harding (dies 1923: heart failure); 1940, Roosevelt (for third term) (dies 1945, during fourth term: stroke); 1960, John F Kennedy (dies 1963: assassin's bullet).

From the onset of Harrison's reign in 1840, no president elected in a year ending in '0' would leave the White House alive. The curse proved as good as its word. Moreover, Taylor aside, no sitting president from the George Washington on who was elected outside of a year ending in '0' has met an untimely end while in office.

And the weird coincidences are not restricted to death. Take the submerged patterns linking the assassinations of Lincoln and Kennedy. One of the cutest sees Lincoln shot in Ford's theatre, while Kennedy is killed in a Lincoln convertible manufactured by the Ford Motor Company. Does chance work in mysterious ways? Is a shadowy hand drawing order from chaos? Possibly. Or as sceptics claim, is this nothing more than a convenient selection of facts – are we simply seeing faces in the clouds?

Perhaps. But perhaps not. David McMinn cites the Fisher Exact Probability test, which was used to yield a significance level of 0.00004; the result concluded that the pattern is a very unlikely result of mere chance. Even a more conservative approach, McMinn claims, by mathematician Michael Capobianco returned a significance level of less than 0.1.

If chance as an explanation can be questioned, the curse is back in the game. Questions, however, remain: why would it strike only once every 20 years? Putting that aside, and with the benefit of hindsight, why did Reagan (elected in 1980) and Bush (2000) survive?

In his earlier career in the Wild West, Reagan was used to dodging screen bullets. In 1981, his guile was tested as never before when a real assassin's bullet came within inches of his heart. Reagan's survival suggested to some that the curse had been lifted. Further evidence came in the years succeeding 2000, when the baby Bush era saw a grenade that failed to go off and a pair of wayward shoes hot off the heels of a well-oiled if somewhat disgruntled Iraqi. The irony was that one of the most unpopular presidents in American history had proven remarkably resistant to such attacks.

Sceptics claimed that this was the death-knell for a curse-cycle peddled by mystics and mired in hogwash. For believers, Reagan had been very, very lucky; and as for Bush? Well, Dubya had never been 'chosen' as the terms of the curse were said to demand – the 'stolen' election of 2000 had seen to that. So, the curse was still there, bubbling under.

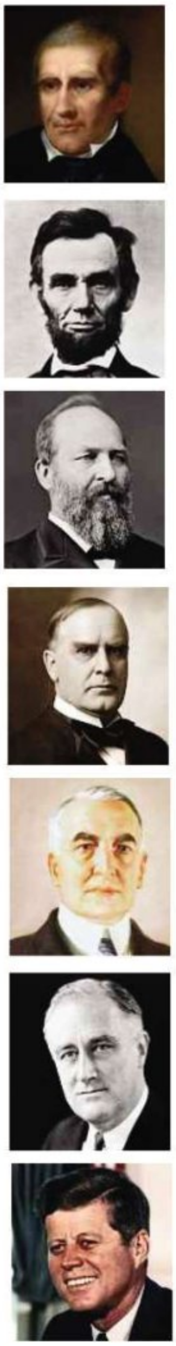
Some astrologers have considered the possible influence of a Jupiter-Saturn conjunction on a presidential death cycle. In ancient cultures, these planets were often considered the great chronocrators, or governors of time. Their resulting alignment (known as a conjunction), which occurs on an average 20-year cycle, was considered by many to signify periods of great socio-political-economic change. Among their many attributes, Jupiter is said to represent the ruler, while Saturn symbolises death. It's not hard to see where joining the dots might take us…

As a result, the past two centuries of Jupiter-Saturn conjunctions on a 20-year rotation have been touted as a possible factor in presidential deaths. During this period (1800–2000) only three presidents survived while in office. Of these, the conjunctions accompanying Monroe's election (1820) fell on the fire sign Aries and Reagan's appointment (1980) on the air sign of Libra. Aside from Monroe and Reagan, all conjunctions have fallen on Earth signs Taurus, Virgo or Capricorn; an association – with the exception of Jefferson (1800) – that has without fail led to the death of the presidential incumbent.

The year 2000 was the final act in this particular astrological marriage of convenience. Its arrival led many to posit (**FT145:14**) that George W Bush would be the next – and last – with conjunctions thereafter falling to the air signs Gemini, Libra and Aquarius. Bush, however, as history would tell, did not answer to universal laws, only unto himself. His survival in office, sceptics say, put paid to any talk that US democracy was written not in the constitution, but rather the stars.

It is, of course, possible that Tecumseh, or his brother Tenskwatawa, set his fateful curse in conjunction with these two ruling gas giants and their astrological alignments. This would explain the motive behind a 20-year cycle.

The question remains: why, then, did Bush survive? Was it down to the 'stolen' election? Did the 'rightful' candidate go one better even than Reagan and dodge a pre-destined bullet? Is the inconvenient truth for Al Gore that he owes his life to his Republican rival? FT



Further reading

David E. McMinn: "The twenty-year death cycle of American presidents" (www.davidmcminn.com).

Richard Nolle: "The Jupiter-Saturn conjunction" (www.astropro.com).

Ohio History Central: "An online encyclopaedia of Ohio history" (www.ohiohistorycentral.org).

TLE & anomalous experience

EMMA McNEIL wonders whether research into temporal lobe epilepsy offers a uniquely compelling 'theory of everything' when it comes to understanding strange phenomena.

EMMA McNEIL is a freelance journalist and long-time fortean who also shares news and information on a range of topics including ethical living, lifestyle and the environment.

There's a sudden drop in temperature. The room feels icy cold. You feel an unearthly, malign presence. You can just see it out of the corner of your eye – at least you think you can. Congratulations! You've just seen your first ghost. Or have you just had your first temporal lobe seizure?

A number of sceptics, scientists and parapsychologists think that many strange experiences can be explained as the result of disturbances in the brain's temporal lobe. Thanks to our increased understanding of the workings of the human brain, we may now have a handy physiological explanation for a wide range of anomalous experiences: disturbances in witnesses' temporal lobes (such as an epileptic seizure) could be responsible for their experiencing a whole range of uncanny symptoms.

The left and right temporal lobes' day-to-day work involves such functions as memory, language and emotions. They are also important in processing information from our senses, including smell, taste and vision. People with temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE) often describe strange sensations and experiences. For example, they may see strange lights or have a strange taste in the mouth. They may notice an odd smell, or experience a change in temperature which leaves them feeling exceptionally hot or shivery. There can be intense feelings of *déjà vu* or *jamais vu*, anxiety and panic or elation and euphoria. Sometimes, they perform automatisms such as scratching or lip-smacking. There can even be vivid hallucinations. If the seizure activity spreads across the brain, the patient may go on to have a tonic-clonic seizure (formerly known as *grand-mal*) and lose consciousness entirely, perhaps shaking or jerking violently.

CHRIS THORNLEY /SOURCE CREATIVE

Looking at the symptoms of TLE and studying witness accounts of supposedly paranormal phenomena, it's easy to see parallels between the symptoms of temporal lobe seizures and experiences of various anomalies. A whole range of strange experiences might be explained as temporal lobe seizures (see **FT71:32; 76:51**). Ghost sightings are easiest, with the sudden chill, sense of foreboding and looming presence. Alien abductions and other bedtime visitors are also tidily disposed of. In fact, once you put your mind to it, it's hard to find a paranormal experience that *can't* be explained, at least in part, by a disturbance of the temporal lobe.

It's easy to see parallels between TLE and anomalies

For example, any time someone sees something strange (in the absence of concrete permanent physical evidence), it *could* be a hallucination. So that's cryptids and other weird creature sightings explained. Bigfoot witnesses often note a particularly foul smell at the time of their encounter, presumably coming from the mystery hominid; and if the lumbering man-beast should make a sound, then that could still be part of a hallucination. Olfactory, visual and auditory hallucinations are all known symptoms of temporal lobe epilepsy.

People with TLE also report missing time – which means that the time slips and fugues associated with, say, alien abductions can now be put in the 'solved' pile too. Oh, and as you don't remember where you were during your episode of missing time, then you probably moved those objects or did that funny writing too: apports or poltergeist activity are no longer instances of either supernatural or fraudulent activity – the witness just doesn't remember doing this stuff.

With *déjà vu* common in TLE, if you feel you've been here before or that you saw tonight's news report last week, it's almost certainly just a small temporal lobe event and not evidence of either precognition or reincarnation.

The tendency towards dissociative states and de-personalisation (in which a subject has the sensation of watching themselves act) during a seizure means we can also chalk up Out-Of-Body experiences and even some Near-Death Experiences to our new favourite explanation for the extraordinary.

The adaptability of the temporal lobe explanation to almost *any* strange experience is obviously its most appealing feature, but there are other reasons why this explanation is gaining ground. For one thing, it is extremely sympathetic to the witness, who no longer needs to be labelled as mad, delusional or lying. He or she is just experiencing a strange by-product of the way our brains work.

We've long known that the brain affects our perceptions of the world, and this is just another example of how our minds can play tricks on us. A temporal lobe seizure giving rise to an experience of the paranormal is unsettling and fascinating. But it's no more bizarre than an optical illusion or a strange and vivid dream. It doesn't require any rewriting of physics or any change in our understanding of the way the Universe works and our place in it.

One of the most important principles of science is that effects should be reproducible. The theory that experiences of anomalous phenomena come from a disturbance in the temporal lobe has been borne out many times in laboratory conditions. For example, in 2000 Michael Persinger and his team were able to induce a "haunting" in a subject using magnetic fields. Persinger has been able to reproduce such experiences a number of times and capture the results on an electroencephalogram (EEG). This has culminated in the creation of the so-called "God Helmet" which can induce spiritual experiences by stimulating the wearer's temporal lobe (see **FT42:50–54; 201:39; 205:4–5**).

The temporal lobe theory also, to a surprisingly large degree, has the potential to explain some of the "physical" manifestations of paranormal experience that might otherwise give researchers pause for thought. It's known that during complex partial seizures patients can scratch at themselves and cause injuries. If the seizure progresses to a full tonic-clonic with violent movements they might even appear to jerk off the bed, seemingly "levitating". In fact, a diagnosis of epilepsy has to be ruled out (along with various other neurological and psychiatric disorders) before the Catholic Church can perform an exorcism. Anneliese Michel, who died during an exorcism in 1976, had been diagnosed with severe temporal lobe epilepsy. Tragically, she refused treatment for the condition and had become convinced she was demonically possessed.

But it's important to realise (and this is another reason the temporal lobe explanation is so clever) that the witness doesn't have to have epilepsy for a brief temporal lobe glitch to produce seizure symptoms. It's widely believed that one in 20 people will have a seizure at some point in their lifetime. Just because you've once seen a ghost, that doesn't mean you now have epilepsy. But if, like many witnesses, you have a history of recurrent strange experiences then you might have epilepsy, which is defined as having recurrent unprovoked seizures.

Current thinking about epilepsy proposes that everybody has a "seizure threshold". For most people, the 19 out of 20, this threshold is so high that they will never experience a seizure at all. But a whole variety of things can lower an individual's seizure threshold: things like fever, fatigue, head injury, stress or hunger. External factors such as magnetic fields can also trigger temporal lobe anomalies. These don't just have to be administered in a laboratory but could occur naturally. Again, the hypothesis fits the evidence: strange phenomena often seem to cluster in specific places. If an area has a particular problem with magnetic fields, it could repeatedly lower the seizure thresholds of individuals, creating a history as a "haunted" or "weird" location.

Researchers can flesh the hypothesis out a bit more by merging it with other explanations for extraordinary happenings. By adding these, it's possible to expand the net a bit wider and explain even more strange events – even those with multiple witnesses.

Several years ago, ergot poisoning and the influence of other moulds (including hallucinogenic mushrooms whether ingested on purpose or by accident) was a popular retrospective explanation for a number of different episodes of strangeness, including the Salem Witch Trials and France's werewolf panics. Conveniently, such poisonings are known to cause seizures.

In some cases, it would be ridiculous to suggest that every person in a group that experiences something uncanny must have been having a seizure. In these cases, we do have to resort to a bit of abnormal psychology by playing the "mass hysteria" card. But we might still suggest that the primary or index case was experiencing a temporal lobe event. The others were then influenced to share the delusion.

But should we be worried that it's all a little *too* tidy? That the theory is so elegant and comprehensive that any investigations of other theories come to seem rather pointless? And isn't it a bit boring and reductionist that centuries' worth of forteana all boils down to a weakness of the human temporal lobe?

And is it even an accurate explanation? Most people with the condition don't go around having extraordinary and otherwise inexplicable experiences. A seizure might feel strange and bizarre, but most of the time it's simply a tedious medical interruption of normal life.

Suggesting that all these witnesses (particularly those experiencing a number of incidents) are having seizures has serious implications. A situation could arise where someone was suspected of having epilepsy when they don't. While awaiting diagnosis, a patient is unable to drive or operate machinery in case they have a seizure and harm themselves or others. They might very well lose their income. Epilepsy is a life-changing diagnosis, and the stress of waiting for confirmation for a diagnosis is enormous. If the weight of clinical evidence (for example, they had seen strange lights on a number of occasions) is sufficient, then a patient wouldn't even need to have had an abnormal EEG to be diagnosed. Following diagnosis, the patient might be put on anti-epileptic drugs, which can cause serious side effects.

What if TLE just *mimics* paranormal experiences? Does the existence of paranormal-like TLE symptoms exclude the possibility of strange experiences caused by other things? It is possible that while certain parts of the brain produce paranormal effects there remains outside of the brain paranormal activity that is *not* produced inside the brain. It's also possible that when researchers identify parts of the brain that can produce paranormal experiences that what they have really found is the part of the brain, the mechanism, where humans experience and process the uncanny phenomena of the Universe at large.

But the temporal lobe hypothesis is far too useful to be abandoned anytime soon, and remains one of the most compelling attempts at an ultimate fortean explanation for everything. Unfortunately, it seems unlikely that it will ever explain frog falls. FT

EXPERIENCE SOME *REAL* PARANORMAL ACTIVITY

The man who
foresaw 9/11
in a dream

The strange old
woman who haunted
a family's staircase

The man who woke
to find a demon
in his bedroom

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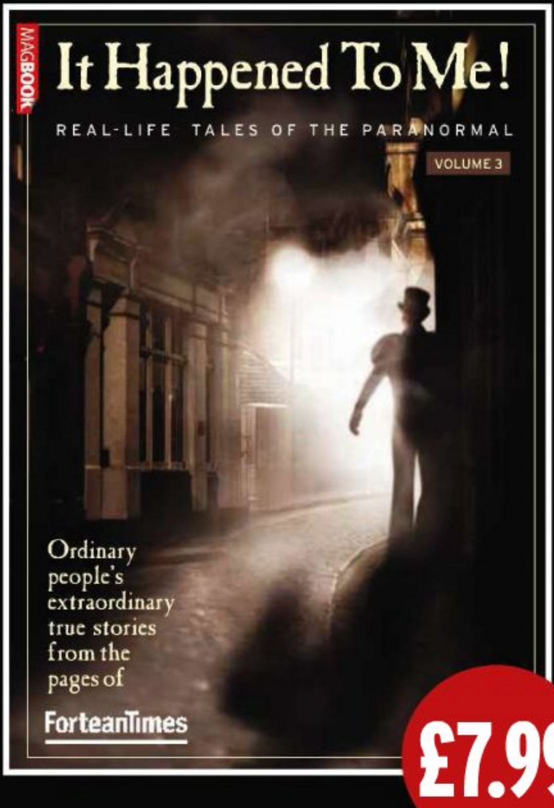

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Granted power to hex and vex

Despite the vivid, newly discovered confessions that are the starting point of this exhaustive study of Scottish witchcraft, the central character remains enigmatic

The Visions of Isobel Gowdie

Magic, Witchcraft and Dark Shamanism in Seventeenth-Century Scotland

Emma Wilby

Sussex Academic Press 2010

Pb, 604pp, notes, bib, ind, £35.00, ISBN 9781845191801

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £32.00

In the 16th and 17th centuries, as many as 3,000 witchcraft trials took place in Scotland. A third ended in burnings, which considering the population was less than half a million, makes it the most prolific witch-hunting country in early modern Europe. About three-quarters of suspects were women. There were several acute panics, the last of which occurred in 1661–2.

The most famous episode from that terrible purge, indeed in the whole history of Scottish witchcraft, involved Isobel Gowdie from Lochloy. She confessed four times between April and May 1662, describing her compact with Satan, who rebaptised her (with blood), ravished her, and empowered her to hex and vex her neighbours. These confessions were filed away until the 1830s, when they were transcribed for Robert Pitcairn's *Ancient Criminal Trials in Scotland*. Emma Wilby rediscovered them only recently in the National Archives of Scotland.

Wilby makes this the starting point of the first full-length history of Gowdie's confessions, which have inspired novels, plays, songs and a requiem. We hear of her torrid relationship with the devil, her membership of a coven, an audience with fairy royalty, conspiracies against a minister and a laird, and some bizarre sniping at locals with 'elf arrows'. Wilby says everything there is to say about Gowdie, and then some.

She evokes the physical and mental world of 17th-century Nairnshire, the lives of the poor and their insecurities. This is the essential backdrop for understanding not just why thanes and cottars alike believed in witches, but why Isobel Gowdie might have thought that she was one. A barefooted cottager scratching a living from the shores of Moray Firth knew little comfort, but she could imagine it, and maybe even seek it by occult means.

Witchcraft stories like Gowdie's are in many ways intensely local, but also have a metaphysical dimension that carries us up and out into intangible realms. Wilby takes past attitudes and beliefs at face value, and properly resists the kneejerk diagnosis that such women must have been insane or tripping on ergot. And she is happy to speculate, sometimes rather wildly, to make sense of things, and "to explore avenues as diverse as Highland oral traditions, Amazonian shamanism, Corsican folklore, Christian mysticism, Nordic mythology, criminal psychology and North American dream research". Gowdie said some peculiar things: why, and what did they mean?

Readers familiar with the mythology of witchcraft will not be surprised to learn that the Egyptologist Margaret Murray saw in Isobel Gowdie a perfect example of a woman's spiritual existence beneath the radar of orthodox Christianity, deeply plugged into an authentic primæval tradition. Gowdie is a star-turn in Murray's largely discredited study *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921). But just because Gowdie said she belonged to a Satanic demi-monde does not make it more likely it existed.

> "she behaved like a shaman – part mystical benefactor, part vengeful aggressor"

Wilby does not go as far as Murray. Many historians' interpretations are reductionist, it seems, explaining phenomena away. At the very least, she suggests, Gowdie had visionary experiences which conformed to the world of the witches rather than to the contrivances of academic demonology. In short, she behaved like a shaman – part mystical benefactor, part vengeful aggressor – in a 'dark dream cult'. This was "an enhanced means of self-expression for the disaffected". One wonders whether such cross-cultural parallels stand up as real causes. We have fascinating evidence of the idea of witchcraft in action, played out in a faltering dialogue between the educated elite and unlettered majority. This is amazing enough. But we also catch glimpses of an ordinary 17th-century woman's subconscious, and that is quite extraordinary.

The problem is that her interlocutors were powerful, literate and male: they asked the questions and recorded the answers. So how much did Gowdie actually say? It's impossible to know, but uses of peasant vernacular in the record are suggestive. There are further clues in the way folkloric flights of fancy are cut short, whereas details of homicide and apostasy – material evidence for a trial – were encouraged and expanded. Wilby does not automatically accept that Gowdie's confession was made without torture, as was claimed at the time.

And what of Isobel Gowdie? The irony is that although her confessions are detailed and rich in implication, we know little about her. She was married, probably to a labourer, and at least once in her life revealed her deepest fantasies and desires, shaped and propelled by passion and conscience. Pitcairn believed that she was executed, based on wishful thinking or an assumption, still common, that accused witches were all doomed. In fact, except during the most severe panics, acquittal was the norm throughout the early modern world.

Wilby's research leads her to conclude that Gowdie went to the stake. But there is no hard proof that she was even tried, and it is perhaps as likely that after her file had been scrutinised by the Scottish privy council it was tossed in a drawer, and order made for the prisoner's release. "In the last analysis", the author concedes, "Isobel remains a mystery: resolutely dwarfed, as any author should be, by the substance of her own narrative".

Malcolm Gaskill

Fortean Times Verdict

HISTORY OF A SCOTTISH WITCH WHO REMAINS A MYSTERY **7**

King Zil's hill

A fine account of what may well be the boldest archæological project in Britain

The Story of Silbury Hill

Jim Leary & David Field

English Heritage 2010
Pb, 160pp, illus, notes, ress, bib, ind, £14.99, ISBN 9781848020467
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.49

Wiltshire's Silbury Hill is a man-made cone of earth and chalk, over 30m (100ft) high.

In May 2000, some 4,300 years after the hill's construction, a large hole appeared in its flat top. It was a tunnel dug in 1776 and not backfilled, one of many attempts to find the gold equestrian statue of 'King Zil' held by local legend to be buried inside. Record rainfall in early 2000 had caused the rupture and the rain continued; there was widespread fear that the rest of Silbury would collapse like a soggy pudding.

English Heritage, Silbury's custodians, eventually decided to send a team of miners and archæologists inside the hill's many tunnels, to record what was there before filling all the voids with chalk.

This book is an excellent first-hand account of what is probably the boldest ever project in British archæology. Beautifully illustrated, with a David Inshaw cover, the text is clear, informative and witty. Most importantly, it contains facts. Of what has been written previously about Silbury Hill, some is interesting speculation; most is New Age tosh.

The only previous factual book was the excellent but academic 1997 *Sacred Mound, Holy Rings* – not a Tantric sex guide, but a 30-year-late report of the famous BBC-sponsored excavation by Richard Atkinson, who also neglected to backfill his tunnel.

The late Professor is often criticised for failing to finish anything properly (for years he kept important finds in a shoebox under his bed), but here he is treated kindly, as are the various Druids, Pagans and assorted cranks who today claim Silbury as their own.

Rather surprisingly for an English Heritage publication, there is a frank and lengthy account of the hostility and protest levelled at the custodians as they procrastinated for a year over what to do about the hole. The curious and the stupid, meanwhile, were climbing over fences to explore the hole, which continued to grow. Crop circle enthusiasts Janet Ossebaard and Bert Janssen notoriously abseiled into the tunnel by night, looking for UFOs (?). Had anyone been lost or injured inside, Silbury might have been torn apart by rescue workers.

The Story of Silbury Hill reflects archæology's current spirit of openness, but also attempts to set some of the record straight. Michael Dames's widely-accepted "harvest hill" theory, that Silbury was constructed in late summer, was actually based on the evidence of a single flying ant found by Atkinson and subsequently lost. Nevertheless, Dames is credited with "engaging people with the Avebury landscape at a deep level".

Though this book contains much new information and interpretation, the fundamental question of why Silbury was built remains, not surprisingly, unresolved. Because it wasn't there, perhaps?

Steve Marshall

Fortean Times Verdict
CLEAR, INFORMED, WITTY, HANDSOME AND FACT-FILLED 9

John Michell

From Atlantis to Avalon

Paul Screeton

Alternative Albion 2010
Pb, 127pp, illus, notes, ind, £12.95, ISBN 9781905646166
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.30

This is a handsome and well-written biographical and bibliographical account of John Michell. Paul Screeton charts John's books, pamphlets and articles chronologically, and includes reminiscences of him from the appropriate times. John's personal journey took in such diverse subjects as astroarchæology, flying saucers, ley lines, crop circles, drugs, sacred geometry, traditional measures and British eccentrics, as well as general forteana.

John was, by all accounts, a charming and erudite companion, having many connections with the "upper crusties", New Agers and members of the once burgeoning but now largely moribund "alternative society" or counterculture. He was also quite popular with the ladies, it seems…

His literary output spanned alternative publications, such as *Fanatic* and *International Times*, and more mainstream media. I had no idea, for example, that he had regular columns in the *Daily Mirror* and *The Oldie*. And there were also the self-published items he produced, sometimes for his circle of friends, keeping alive the radical tradition of self-publishing.

Although Screeton is not uncritical in his approach (he clearly identifies areas where he and Michell disagreed), this is not a critical assessment of Michell, and his works and influence. That, I suspect, will have to wait till a later date. We will then see whether he is regarded as visionary of the 'Age of Aquarius' or an eccentric.

In the meantime, for those who have fond memories of him and/or would like a guide to his writings, this book will serve admirably.

Richard Alexander

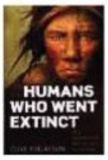
Fortean Times Verdict
GOOD INTRO TO A CHARMING AND MUCH MISSED FORTEAN 8

The Humans Who Went Extinct

Why Neanderthals Died Out and We Survived

Clive Finlayson

Oxford University Press 2010
Pb, 273pp, illus, endnotes, index, £9.99, ISBN 9780199239191
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £8.99



Homo sapiens is only the latest of several versions of the *Homo* model. But why we survived – while Neanderthals, *Homo erectus* and other humanoids died out – remains controversial. In *The Humans Who Went Extinct*, Clive Finlayson offers a refreshing new perspective on this old debate.

Finlayson's view is, predominately, ecological. And he makes some telling comparisons – such as with the spread of collared doves and shifting populations of azure winged magpies – that illustrate the importance of changes in geography, climate and resources in determining survival. He shows unequivocally that "in human evolution, success has often been the result of having been in the right place at the right time".

Finlayson also challenges several conventional views, such as that *Homo sapiens* developed Aurignacian technology, which is characterised by bladed tools. He points out that the lack of a firm temporal association between Aurignacian tools and remains of *Homo sapiens* means that we can't rule out that Neanderthals might have been responsible.

Finlayson also hammers several more nails in the coffin of the idea that *Homo sapiens* outcompeted Neanderthals. Climate changes are a more likely culprit for the Neanderthals' demise. As with the straight-tusked elephant and the narrow-nosed rhinoceros, Neanderthals become isolated in areas "of relatively mild climate and rugged landscape where pockets of woodland survived". Eventually, he argues, the increasingly fragmented population couldn't survive.

Finlayson's synoptic literature review paints on a broad historical, geographic and scientific canvas. However, I felt that, occasionally, he sacrificed depth for breadth. In several places, he mentions a controversy without discussing the detailed evidence that supports each side. For example, not every scientist agrees that modern man emerged from Africa. Our direct ancestors might have multiregional origins. He notes that "[T]he embers still fly from time to time in paleoanthropological meetings where our origins come under renewed scrutiny." Later in the book, he suggests that the Gravettians, who migrated from the Russian plains into Europe around 30,000 years ago, are the most important lineage in the evolution of modern Europeans. I feel a more detailed discussion of the evidence supporting the "out of Africa" and multiregional theories would help better set the context and place his argument on a firmer footing.

Finlayson also says the "big surge in art came with the Gravettian people". He may well be right; but to convince me he would need to fully exclude the alternatives, such as that archæologists simply have not discovered older art, they were created on highly perishable material or were deliberately destroyed. Similarly, I felt that a more detailed discussion would help readers unfamiliar with genetic studies appreciate their importance and relevance.

Despite my quibbles (and that's all they are), *The Humans Who Went Extinct* is an excellent popular introduction to human evolution. It's indispensible if you're interested in cryptoid humanoids. (I found myself speculating how the discussion dovetailed into the Sasquatch, Yeti and Almas traditions.) Biologists (myself included) who tend to focus on genetics and anatomy when looking at human evolution can learn much from Finlayson's challenging, insightful and informative ecological perspective.

The Humans Who Went Extinct should be essential reading for everyone interested in human origins.

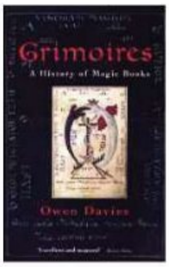
Mark Greener

Fortean Times Verdict

PROVOCATIVE NEW PERSPECTIVE ON AN OLD DEBATE **9**

Magical history tour

This history of grimoires is essential for anyone interested in magical writing, but it has lacunæ in its more recent coverage



Grimoires

A History of Magic Books

Owen Davies

Oxford University Press 2010

Pb, 370pp, illus, bib, notes, ind, £9.99, ISBN 9780199590049

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £8.99

As a quick glance through the 60 pages of notes and references backing up Davies's history reveals, magic and occultism has become a fertile field for academic study in the last 40 or 50 years. Davies himself has authored a number of these works, and this concise history of magical books is undoubtedly an important contribution to the field. In eight excellently illustrated chapters, nearly all of which could be expanded quite easily into book-length studies, Davies covers the history of grimoires in the ancient and mediæval world; during the Renaissance and the witch-hunting era; in the Enlightenment; in the overseas colonies of the various European powers; in 19th-century Europe; in America of the same period; in the pulp publishing era; and fictional grimoires such as Lovecraft's *Necronomicon*.

This is, as stated on the cover, a history of grimoires rather than a study of their contents, with the emphasis on authorship and, in the print era, publication details and publishers, distribution and the use to which the texts were put. The range of research presented here is, frankly, astonishing (although the corollary, of course, is that one's occasionally left wishing for more detail), and Davies is particularly good when dealing with the normally less well explored areas such as the importation of magical texts into colonial countries such as those of the Caribbean and South America, the African-American and Hispanic markets in the USA, and the cheap, exploitation end of the market for books of spells and divination texts. As he correctly points out, such texts as the *Clavicule of Solomon* or the *Grand Albert* were frequently used for raising spirits to aid in treasure-hunting, and Davies's interests seem to mainly centre on such practical, 'low' magic texts concerning money and love magic, curse removal and healing, rather than the more mystical concerns of 'high' magic. This slightly narrow interpretation of grimoires may, of course, be simply due to lack of space – the book is already bulky and densely detailed – but it may also be responsible for the slight weakness it displays in dealing with 20th-century occultism.

Although Gerald Gardner and the foundation of modern Wicca are dealt with in reasonable detail, it's frankly surprising to find no mention whatever of Aleister Crowley's *Magick in Theory and Practice*; indeed, Crowley hardly appears at all. Similarly, Charles Leland's influential *Aradia* is only mentioned in passing. And despite the plainly practical aspirations of Chaos Magic, the movement and its literature is entirely absent, as is the vast magical output of Minnesota's Llewellyn Publications, let alone the current output of specialist small presses such as Teitan. Perhaps the skimpy treatment of contemporary magical writing and publishing reflects Davies's apparent belief that "most of us in the West no longer need magic in our lives"; as far as this reviewer can see, quite the opposite seems to be the case, and magic, rather than declining, would appear to be in robust good health.

There are a number of minor quibbles, besides. Unsurprisingly, given the vast number of names and titles discussed, the index is rather sketchy; John Dee, for example, appears only once in the index, but seven times in the book. And Davies's hold on Greek seems, frankly, a little relaxed. Simon Magus is, quite obviously, 'Simon the Magician'; one can hardly, then, refer to 'Magus' as a surname. Similarly, in mentioning 'Saint John of Chrysostom' he appears to think that Chrysostom is a place name, rather than an oratorical epithet meaning 'golden mouth'. And the repeated spelling of one of Paracelsus's middle names as 'Bombatus' rather than 'Bombastus' would suggest this is an authorial rather than a proofreading error.

Nonetheless, it has to be said that overall this is a marvellously wide-ranging work, packed with astonishing detail, and a fascinating read; and this paperback edition is excellently priced. It may not be absolutely all-encompassing, but what it does do, it does wonderfully well. For anyone interested in magical writing and publication, it's essential.

Steve Moore

Fortean Times Verdict

FASCINATING, GOOD RESEARCH BUT NOT COMPREHENSIVE **8**

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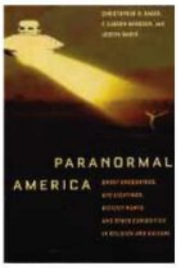
Statistics of the paranormal?

By looking at the lives of ordinary Americans, the authors move beyond the simple statistics of belief to a more nuanced appreciation of various unshakeable credos



Paranormal America

Ghost Encounters, UFO Sightings, Bigfoot Hunts, and Other Curiosities in Religion and Culture

Christopher E Bader, F Carson Menchken & Jospeh Baker

New York University Press 2010
Pb, 272pp, illus, notes, refs, ind, $20.00, ISBN 9780814791356

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £11.69

We often hear of large-scale opinion polls conducted to gauge the extent and sincerity of contemporary opinion about such far-reaching and controversial topics as climate change, Darwinian evolution and belief in 'the paranormal'. Sometimes these surveys – by big organisations such as Ropers or Gallup – include more fortean topics such as belief about dreams, UFOs, ghosts and Bigfoot; sometimes, too, they try to plumb the depths of religious belief in such things as Satan, angels or miracles.

When the results are reported, we are told that so-many respondents 'believe' this or that, and there is usually an extrapolation from the survey figures to the population at large. For example, a poll conducted for CNN/*Time*, in June 1997, declared that nearly three-quarters of the 1,024 adults questioned said they had never seen a UFO or known anyone who had, and yet 54 per cent believed intelligent life exists outside Earth.

According to a useful summary on the Extraterrestrial Contact website (ufoevidence.org), a Gallup poll in 1947 – the year of the Roswell incident and Kenneth Arnold's sighting – found that 90 per cent of the American population did not believe in UFOs. Since then the figure for believers has fluctuated wildly in different polls, eg: 1996, *Newsweek*, 48 per cent; 1999, Roper, 25 per cent; 2000, *Life* magazine, 43 per cent; 2002, Roper, 72 per cent.

Significantly, the nearer you get to the present, the more complicated the surveys become, including related issues such as belief in extraterrestrial life generally, abductions and whether governments are covering up contact with aliens. Very rarely do you get any correlation with the burgeoning trope of high-level conspiracy and the general distrust of official statements.

In 1991, ufologists Budd Hopkins and David Jacobs commissioned a Roper Poll to determine how many Americans might have experienced an 'alien abduction'. Based upon 119 positive responses out of nearly 6,000 replies, Hopkins estimated that nearly four million Americans might have been abducted by extraterrestrials. This 'preposterous' conclusion was soundly debunked as "obviously flawed" by Susan Blackmore in *Skeptical Inquirer* [http://tinyurl.com/23xskw8].

Polling complex issues is one thing; the dearth of intelligent analysis and informed interpretation of what these poll results mean is another. That's where this study by Bader and Mencken (professors of sociology at Baylor University, a private Baptist university in Waco, Texas) and Baker (a professor of sociology at East Tennessee State University) comes in. This book-length analysis of contemporary beliefs about ghosts, UFOs, Bigfoot, "and other curiosities in religion and culture" is based on the Baylor Religion Survey (BRS) carried out by the Gallup organisation in two phases, in 2005 and 2007. More than 350 questions on such topics as atheism, evil and "religious and paranormal beliefs and experiences" were answered by 1,648 adult Americans selected randomly.

When the results were published in 2008 – in *What Americans Really Believe* by Dr Rodney Stark – the overall conclusion of the BRS was that American religiosity was increasing. This was promptly challenged by US humanists for emphasising a relatively small increase in religious believers at the expense of atheists and agnostics, whom the Council for Secular Humanism say, based on Harris polls, have increased by five per cent to make up 20 per cent of the population. (If you want to follow the debate, go to http://tinyurl.com/2enj56o / baylor.edu). All it shows to an old sceptic like me is that you can prove anything with statistics.

Still, the BRS had an honest go at questions such as "are Bible believers credulous and superstitious people, who will believe anything?". According to Stark, they found that "conservatively religious Americans" were far more likely to believe "in such things as dreams, Bigfoot, UFOs, haunted houses and astrology" than "those who identify themselves as Evangelicals, born again, Bible believers and fundamentalists". It is not religion in general that suppresses such beliefs, he argues.

What *Paranormal America* does is to explore how that pans out at the grass roots, in the lives of ordinary Americans, drawing on fieldwork instead of relying on statistics.

The authors got out of the lab and joined courses, meetings, conferences, a ghost vigil and a Bigfoot hunt, talked to UFO contactees and research organisations and sat in on Pentecostal gatherings, all reported here in detail and with sociological apparatus.

They conclude that religious conservatism in America is declining, as measured by its two major characteristics: church attendance and biblical literalism. At the same time, they predict a growth in Roman Catholicism, evangelical Protestantism, non-Judeo-Christian religions and secularism, and along with these a more open embracing of the paranormal, especially in the New Age "spiritual but not religious" sector.

The BRS found that, currently, 68 per cent of Americans hold at least one paranormal belief, and our authors confidently predict this will rise – largely due to Hispanic immigration – to 72.7 per cent by 2050.

What does this mean for forteans, finding our own way between rising faith in supernatural forces and entities on the one hand, and increasing scepticism of a more assertive sort on the other?

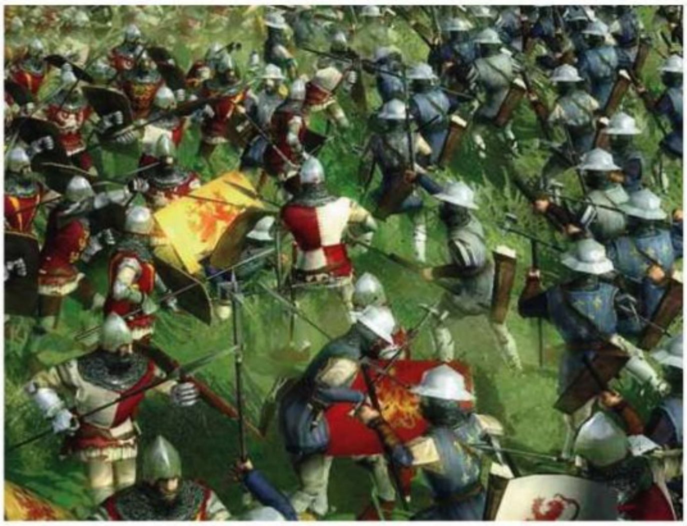
I have some sympathy for the vicar, pictured in a cartoon *FT* printed 35 years ago in **FT10:13**. Standing at the church door, he is watching a little old lady exit the congregation and says to a colleague: "Her unshakeable faith in God would inspire me too, if it weren't for the fact that she has an unshakeable belief in the Loch Ness Monster and flying saucers!"

In a way, this seems to confirm the findings in this book, but leaves the fortean approach, true scepticism and true agnosticism untouched.

We are not ashamed to say "I don't know", not because we take any pride in ignorance but because we will always look for evidence that supports verification that is independent of faith or authoritarianism.

Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict
A SERIOUS LOOK AT WHAT BELIEVERS BELIEVE AND WHY **8**



History Great Battles Medieval

PC £29.99, PS3, Xbox 360 £44.99, Slitherine

Yes, it is impossible to escape the gauntleted grasp of the *Total War* franchise when writing about an RTS with a mediæval setting, but *History Great Battles Medieval* steps centuries forward after its previous sojourn in Rome onto that very era of combat and proves itself robust enough to withstand the onslaught – and a damn sight more limber than its lumbering title would indicate. The 'History' part is because of the History Channel association, one that provides the game with stylish live action intros to the major battles.

Notwithstanding a few niggles, *History Great Battles Medieval* is satisfying enough, cleverly adding elements like unlocked 'Battle Cards', such as 'Bad Omen' and 'Rally' (this last when one of your units goes all lily-livered and decides to flee the battlefield, the former serving to weaken an enemy unit's resolve). The constant levelling up of individual units with weaponry, offensive and defensive skills and increasingly powerful armour provides a crucial sense of forward momentum. Add to this customised insignia and livery for the mounted knights, bowmen, men at arms and light infantry, helping to distinguish them on the battlefield, and you'll most likely be compelled to see this RTS outing through to the bloody end.

The revealing of new challenges as you progress is another plus point, from lifting a siege, raiding the enemy, a tournament battle, assassinating a noble or defending a village redoubt, to momentous historical battles. Even played on the 'Easy' setting (the highest is 'Insane') some of these challenges take more than a decent chunk of grey matter to overcome. The environments might not have the Technicolor lushness of *Lionheart: King's Crusade*, but the ability to scroll down right into the midst of the savage fray in-game adds to the immersion. Programming units' strategy before battle as well as being able to pause in the middle of it and redirect their objectives makes perfect gaming sense.

Recently, I've found few moments more satisfying in a game than countering a barrage of enemy crossbowmen by aiming scores of long distance longbowmen arrows down upon them then watching the buggers scatter like startled mice. As Crécy and Agincourt proved, those English longbowmen can pwn just about everything if you use them wisely. The same goes for units' three essential modes of attack: Passive, Reactive and Aggressive. Like the use of one of your pre-chosen Battle Cards, a switch in the midst of the melée might just turn the tide of the battle in your favour. There are three major campaigns: English, French and The Tale of the Honourable Knight; with a free-form quest map allowing you to decide when and where to fight within a historical framework. An online multiplayer mode is chucked in for good measure. *History Great Battles Medieval* sticks to RTS basics with a few welcome frills that serve only to enhance the gaming experience. It all adds up to a mediæval RTS as solid as Sir Robert Bramborough's heavy infantry, wielding warhammers and enormous shields as they wade into the enemy spearmen.

Nick Cirkovic

Fortean Times Verdict
ONCE MORE UNTO THE MEDIÆVAL RTS BREACH, DEAR FRIENDS... 7

Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm 2

PS3, Xbox 360 £44.99, Namco

Naruto Shippuden is a typical Japanese children's cartoon combined with top-notch Matrix-esque action. Based on the popular anime of the same name, the game sees you take on the role of Naruto and follow a storyline which will be familiar to any of the show's fans. While the plotline is easy enough for novices who have never seen the show to pick up, it definitely feels as though *Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm 2* was made with a hardcore following firmly in mind, giving players a chance to relive some of their favourite anime moments.

This release boasts over 40 playable characters as well as an online mode, which gives you the opportunity to experience its biggest selling point: battles against other extremely dedicated players around the world.

If your child is a fan of the anime they will undoubtedly love this; and if you can stomach the awful dialogue voiced by irritating American tweens in the name of button bashing epic kung fu high jinx, then you just might too.

Fergus Storan

Fortean Times Verdict
POKÉMON MEETS BRUCE LEE 6

WIN A SONIC SCREWDRIVER!

"Who looks at a screwdriver and thinks, 'Ooh, this could be a little more sonic'?" The Doctor of course! The sonic screwdriver has got Doctor Who and his companions out of some tight spots over the course of the show's long history, and now you too can wield the multipurpose Gallifreyan gadget. We have three Sonic Screwdriver Remote Controllers (RRP £34.99) – fully functional remotes compatible with any Nintendo Wii game – to give away.

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THE EDITOR, **FORTEAN TIMES**, DENNIS CONSUMER DIVISION,
30 CLEVELAND STREET, LONDON W1T 4JD, UK.

Rare Exports: A Christmas Tale

Dir Jalmari Helander, Finland 2010
On UK release from 3 December

Though director Jalmari Helander may assert that his intention with *Rare Exports: A Christmas Tale* was to realise on celluloid the "real and original Finnish Santa Claus", one suspects that he might have gone slightly over the top. Yes, Finland is reportedly a rather melancholy country, but it's doubtful that even its most maudlin imaginings could conjure up a beast as fearsome as the Chris Kringle depicted here; a horned, unfathomable horror of Lovecraftian proportions served by an army of feral, naked elves with nought but murder on their feverish brains. Such nightmarish imagery, however, doesn't detract from this strange little movie being an imaginative festive flight of fancy.

The plot sees an American drilling company unearth a monstrous secret 500 metres (1,600ft) below a quiet rural town in northern Finland. This piques both the curiosity and concern of a Santa-suspicious young boy, Pietari (Onni Tommila), whose fears are realised when his father (Jorma Tommila) discovers something unusual in his wolf trap…

It's a clever premise, if not entirely original; transforming Father Christmas from an obese pensioner dolling out presents to something much darker has been adopted by several slasher films (*Silent Night Deadly Night*, most famously), as well as a booze-soaked Billy Bob Thornton in *Bad Santa*.

However, where *Rare Exports* rather creatively deviates from this well-trodden path is in making its Saint Nick a more mythical, folklorish creation reminiscent of *Pan's Labyrinth*'s child-scoffing Pale Man. However, one wishes sometimes that this more fantastical horror element was pursued further; said beast is barely glimpsed during the course of the film, and one is left wanting more. Perhaps this is for the best, allowing viewers to let their imaginations to do their worst in conjuring up the true physical form of this timeless aberration while allowing the film to focus on the relationship between Pietari and his father, which affects and yet never drifts into saccharine, the real-life father-son pair sharing natural chemistry as well as bringing an excellent mix of subtlety and wry humour to their respective roles.

And it is in this humour that the film distinguishes itself most from its festive cinematic counterparts – deliciously dark to the point of nihilism and yet retaining an endearing streak of naive sincerity; one can applaud Helander's desire to create a 1980s-style fantasy-horror accessible to both children and adults, even if its tone is undermined slightly by the worryingly frequent parade of full-frontal male nudity and the apparent naïve ignorance everyone has of the unfortunate implications of an elderly, naked bearded man constantly creeping hungrily towards a young boy.

The film drags occasionally – a few shocks, scares or set-pieces would have spiced things up a bit – but *Rare Exports* is certainly a likeable film, with an entertaining premise, warm characterisation and a terrific sense of humour. Though never boring, it does ultimately feel somewhat incomplete, perhaps in need of some more Joe Dante-esque menace. As such, it remains more than anything a coal-black curiosity, which one can't help but feel could have made more of its premise.

James McMeekin

Fortean Times Verdict
A FESTIVE FINNISH ODDITY, BUT COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER **7**

Madventures

Dir Riku Rantala, Finland 2002–2009
Three seasons available from www.superpirate.com, £19.90

It's not as if there's ever a shortage of travel programmes on our screens, but *Madventures* clearly has something different: the two hosts are Finnish, they backpack without a crew and they only go to the world's most dangerous, bizarre and downright bone-chilling places.

With Riku Rantala in front of the camera and his old school friend Tunna Milonoff behind it, the pair's 'Madventures' include locating a cannibalistic, cremation ground-dwelling cult in India, where they watch devotees drink urine and gulp the heads of live chickens, joining Filipino families who live and sleep in graveyards, tracking down former cannibal tribesmen in Papua New Guinea, dancing at West African Voodoo ceremonies where the faithful bite the heads off live puppies, and being vomited on by prostitutes in Japanese hotels.

The complete absence of a crew or voice-over gives the show a racy, immediate style a world away from the 'looking back on your holiday video' calmness of Michael Palin's travel documentaries. It's as if you're there when the Madventurers duck from gunshots in Brazilian Favelas, take mind-altering drugs from Amazon shamans or bungee-jump off buildings in deadly radiation-filled areas of the Ukraine.

But the series is not all heart-stopping danger. There's comedy too. The portly Riku allows women to eat sushi off his naked body in Japan as well as purchasing a Japanese 'love robot', and the pair play 'paper, scissor, stone' to decide who must eat a live fish, consume a human placenta or knock back a marijuana-based cocktail.

Equally, the fact that they are constantly speaking English even to each other gives the show a very quirky style. They revert into Finnish only when genuinely spooked or as a means of getting round being spied upon in some of the dictatorships they visit. The pair also 'work' nicely as a double act: Riku, bald and built like a barrel, is both temperamental and fearless; the lanky Tunna, with his flowing hair, is far more nervous. Interestingly, he was the first of the two to go backpacking, wittily deciding to go to India (Intia in Finnish) to avoid his INTI (Finnish military service). Upon his return, he persuaded Riku to join him on his next jaunt.

There are one or two gripes. Some bits have obviously been scripted, and the duo's defence of Cultural Relativism becomes a bit preachy at times. The DVDs include various intiguing extras, mostly in Finnish and subtitled in English, which are certainly worth seeing. Watching *Madventures*, it's no surprise that it was voted Finland's best programme of 2009 and has been bought up worldwide.

Ed Dutton

Fortean Times Verdict
TV TRAVELOGUES AS YOU'VE NEVER SEEN THEM BEFORE **8**

Night of the Demon

Dir Jacques Tourneur, UK 1957
Mediumrare, £19.99

"It's in the trees! It's coming!"

And about time too, I hear you say, as we celebrate – at long, long last – the UK DVD release of *Night of the Demon*, quite possibly the greatest film of supernatural horror ever made in Britain. Adapted from MR James's story "Casting the Runes", writer Charles Bennett and director Jacques Tourneur's superb 1957 updating is as much Henry as Montague Rhodes James, pitting a brash, no-nonsense American psychologist against the lurking fears and shadowy surfaces of an old world whose wafer-thin modernity only just masks a mediæval mindset and demonic horrors as old as Stonehenge – used to good effect, along with Clifton Parker's superbly eerie music, in the film's title sequence.

John Holden (Dana Andrews) has crossed the pond to use his psychological expertise in exposing a supposed 'black magician' as a fraud and his deluded followers as a bunch of superstitious dupes. There would be no point in offering Dr Julian Karswell a Randi-style million to prove he's the real deal – Karswell already enjoys the fruits of Satanic success in the charming country pile he shares with his dear old mum. And anyway, Karswell *is* the real deal – as Niall McGinnis's subtle, riveting performance soon convinces us, if not Holden – who quickly finds his pat explanations woefully inadequate and his time running out.

There's plenty here to engage forteans new to this classic film – mysterious runic symbols and indecipherable magical manuscripts, a back-street séance, the notion that the 'old religion' has never died out, sceptics versus believers, and the ambiguity of phenomena that seem to exist as much in the mind as in external reality.

Of course, such ambiguity was bread and butter to director Tourneur, who'd previously helped RKO's Val Lewton redefine horror for the film noir age with classics like *Cat People* and *I Walked with a Zombie*. Thematically and visually – thanks to Ted Scaife's wonderfully atmospheric black and white visuals – *Night of the Demon* is another exercise in cinematic and philosophical chiaroscuro, in which John Holden's daylight world is under constant threat of eclipse from the night terrors conjured up by his Satanic antagonist. Certain sequences retain a genuinely eerie power – clown-faced Karswell conjuring up a storm at a children's tea party, or Holden pursued through the woods by giant, burning footprints and a fireball that might resolve itself at any moment into a "fire demon from Hell" – while the film as a whole is a perfectly paced and impeccably constructed example of old-school horror.

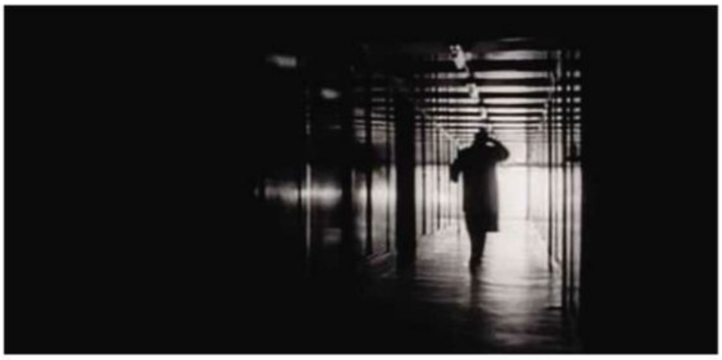
Whether or not you think producer Hal Chester jumped the shark with the inserted demon money shots will depend entirely on whether your approach to screen horror is of the less-is-more or more-is-more variety. Whichever way you incline, *Night of the Demon* is a genre masterpiece and has never looked better than in this complete widescreen print.

The only extra on the disc is the oft-screened American cut – the truncated and retitled *Curse of the Demon* – but the excellent viewing notes almost make up for this.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

AT LAST, A MASTERPIECE OF BRITISH HORROR ON DVD! 10



SHORTS

BRITAIN BY JOVE

(Strike Force Entertainment, £12.99)

Britain By Jove

A proper oddity this: a bizarre mash-up of British Pathé travelogue footage with the story of ventriloquist's dummy Lord Charles taking a grand tour around 1960s Britain in a chauffeur-driven car. Obviously intended to boost tourism from overseas, it's hard to see how Charles's disdain for the peasantry and endless search for alcohol and/or ladies was going to attract many visitors to our shores. Complete with found footage dream sequences, interpolated rapid-fire shots of Pop Art-style Union Jacks and constant interruptions to the ostensible narrative from puppet-master Ray Alan, it's rather as if Jean-Luc Godard had had a few too many before being let loose in a stock footage library. In fact, it was directed by none other than Mike '*Get Carter*' Hodges, and has an oddly memorable performance from Roddy Maude-Roxby as the long-suffering chauffeur who is, in fact, writing the script as he and we go along. As tricksy as *Tristram Shandy* in narrative structure, this is both as mad as a bag of badgers and oddly enjoyable, even if the final episode is a let-down. One of a number of fascinating BP archive releases now available. **DS 7/10**

HIGANJIMA: ESCAPE FROM VAMPIRE ISLAND

(Manga Home Entertainment, £19.99/£15.99)

ESCAPE FROM VAMPIRE ISLAND

Based on a Japanese graphic novel, this largely forgettable effort fails to rise as successfully from its manga origins as do its titular bloodsuckers from their mossy graves. The standard-issue plot sees spunky student Akira pursue a mysterious woman to an uncharted Japanese island in search of his missing brother – who he finds is busy massacring the local undead population. The cast is as typically Japanese as the plot, populated by the standard portly perverts, bat-wielding pseudo-greasers and shy, bespectacled young men with pudding-bowl haircuts who presumably roam the Nipponese landscape *en masse*. The acting is passable, if mannered, while the effects are predominantly titter-inducing. Ultimately, this is a flabby, overlong dollop of nonsense, whose relatively accomplished direction is undermined by a complete lack of scares. **JM 4/10**

NAUSICAÄ OF THE VALLEY OF THE WIND

(Optimum Home Entertainment, £24.99)

Now available on Blu-ray, Hayao Mizazaki's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) is a sickly eco-fable about the princess of a peace-loving valley and her efforts to save a post-apocalyptic world where humans are at war and a toxic jungle harbours giant woodlice; as luck would have it, however, Princess Nausicaä can talk to animals, and her pure and noble heart disarms all guns/mandibles/poisoned spores. Or perhaps it's just that all the evil meanies are distracted by the way she flies around with no trousers on.

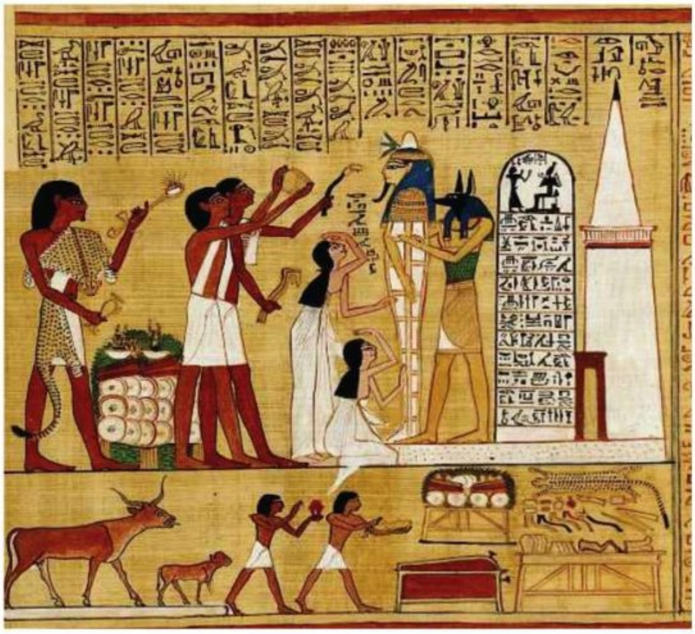
Nausicaä was the catalyst for the formation of Studio Ghibli, and in themes and tone it does prefigure what would become a recognisable Ghibli style. However, anyone expecting the visual sophistication or imaginative richness of films like *Spirited Away* and *Howl's Moving Castle* will be disappointed. The transfer to Blu-ray draws attention to how flat and dated *Nausicaä*'s animation is, and five minutes of its naïve tree-hugging peace-mongering will be enough to goad even the gooeyist of viewers into setting fire to every fluffy pet in the neighbourhood. **Jen Ogilvie 3/10**

Journey through the Afterlife

JEN OGILVIE chooses her favourite spells and enters the strange and dangerous realm of the ancient Egyptian afterlife at the British Museum's latest blockbuster exhibition about the Book of the Dead.

Make a way for me, my soul, my spirit and my shadow, for I am equipped, I am a transfigured spirit."
Spell no. 91

A rich Ancient Egyptian drawing his last mortal breath didn't just lie down and accept eternal rest; he packed his tomb and got ready for his biggest ever adventure. His goal was the Field of Reeds – basically the Nile valley, but with better weather – and to get there he'd need to journey through Osiris's netherworld, fighting demons and chatting with gods, but also breathing, eating and doing everything else involved in staying… if not alive exactly, then something strangely close to it, before he could get his heart weighed and emerge blinking into the sunshine. It was complicated and perilous, so to keep himself safe after death he'd buy a set of spells beforehand, chosen from the vast body of magic words and pictures that we now know of as the Book of the Dead.



THE BRITISH MUSEUM / BOOK OF THE DEAD PAPYRUS OF ANI, C.1275 BC

ABOVE: The 'Opening of the Mouth' ritual. The mummy is held by Anubis, while the family lament and priests reanimate the body.

FACING PAGE: The Devourer, a composite of crocodile, lion and hippopotamus, would eat the hearts of those who failed to satisfy the gods that they had lived a good life.

The British Museum's new exhibition guides you right through this exhausting process – from mummification and burial through the netherworld, or *duat*, and out into the blissful fields beyond – in one of its best blockbusters of recent years. Here, the museum's customary emphasis on detail rather than overview works, thanks to the narrative power of the objects on display: the papyri, mummies, coffins, masks, jewellery, amulets and tomb figurines allow you to piece together an understanding of ancient Egypt's vision of the afterlife.

Every Ancient Egyptian navigated this realm in his or her own way, and so every Book of the Dead was unique. With off-the-peg versions, the scribe would leave a space to add the buyer's name; the very rich would commission their own specially-made Books, meaning they could make their own choice of spells and add family members to the cast of characters. The British Museum has one of the world's best collections of Books of the Dead, and for this exhibition it has borrowed a few more: seeing so many different manuscripts collected together brings home the individuality and reality of their previous owners.

Just as the Books are animated by the character of their owners, so too do they breathe with the spirit of the scribes. Funerary texts were originally carved on the walls of royal pyramids, then written on the surfaces of coffins; by 1600 BC, these texts had evolved into the Book of the Dead, which could be inscribed on coffins, shrouds, bandages or mummy lids (an advanced civilisation's way of scrawling "Get Well Soon" over a plaster cast?) and papyri. It's these papyri, with their fresh energetic strokes and action-packed images, that most vividly retain the impression of their creators. Mostly (there are a few papyri at the end of the exhibition that are more authentically crumbled and Indiana Jones-looking), the manuscripts seem caught just as they were made: the papyrus crisp, the blacks black, the turquoise luminous, the yellow still glittering. Style varied according to personal taste: Ani's Book (1275 BC) is as boisterous as a kids' cartoon; Anhai's (1100 BC), one of the first made for a woman, is more elegant. In some instances, you can even see where different scribes have worked on the same Book: the quality of the line may change or the borders fail to join up. The best example of this is in the awe-inspiring Greenfield Papyrus, made for a priestess called Nestanebtasheru in 930 BC, and at 37m (120ft) the longest Book of the Dead in the world (displayed here in its entirety for the first time); it was illustrated by two different draughtsmen, one of whom drew in a noticeably more graceful and well-proportioned style.

These papyri were crafted and owned by individuals, and so are shaped by a very human self-interest. The ancient Egyptians imagined the *duat* as a complex, material world much like that of the living; and so, ever-practical, they prepared for it as they would for any journey, compiling spells as we'd pack a rucksack. And chief among their concerns, in death as in life, was self-preservation.

Dying did bring some changes, mostly of a mechanical variety, and so the first stages of the papyri show how to overcome them: mummification to preserve the body, and an 'opening of the mouth' ritual so the deceased could breathe again. Once the funerary rites were complete, the soul, or *ba*, often represented as a human-headed bird, was free to leave the body and roam the human world, sail the skies in Ra's boat, or seek out Osiris, so long as when night fell it returned to its bandages. This vision of the afterlife was reflected in the Ancient Egyptians' name for the Book of the Dead: the 'Coming Forth by Day'. Dying was not, then, a termination but rather a different state of being, like sleeping or sickness, in which the self remained essentially intact. Talismans and spells that protected the living would also protect the dead: a headrest used for sleeping could be used again in the tomb; spell 163, against injury and death, could be used to keep the dead body safe and gain admittance to the afterlife.

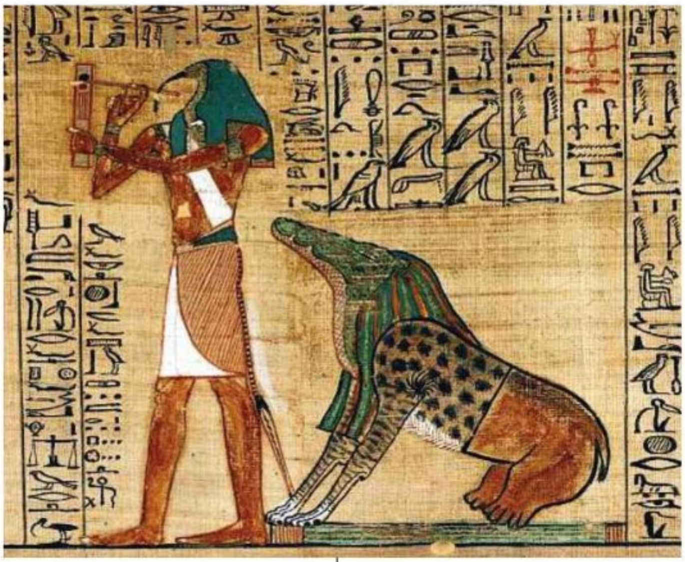
The underworld was as real, richly-detailed and dangerous as the world above ground, and every one of its potential perils had to be foreseen and protected against;

spells 153A and B, for example, guard against the possibility of becoming entangled in the gods' nets. By the same reasoning, much of the afterlife was quite as mundane as earthly existence, and so the living had to prepare some very practical spells for breathing air, eating food or drinking water after death.

Just as death mimicked life, so semi-divinity was but a splash of gold and a few well-chosen words away. Right from the start, mummification and a symbolic gold and lapis lazuli mask imbued the dead with godlike qualities; then, when they weren't transforming themselves into falcons, snakes or lotus flowers, they wandered the netherworld telling other supernatural beings what to do. Such self-assurance is perhaps unsurprising, given the high positions the Book of the Dead owners would have occupied in life. Nevertheless, the deceased come across here as startlingly presumptuous in their dealings with other immortals, and they took whole fistfuls of spells into the tomb with them for the subduing and bossing about of hostile entities: "O you door-keepers who guard your portals, who swallow gods and who gulp down the corpses of the dead… May you guide the deceased, may you open the portals for him."

This mix of the practical and fantastical, the prosaic and divine, looks strikingly like a giant, fantasy-based computer game. The deceased moves through an intricate environment battling a series of snake- and knife-wielding gods before defeating the crocodile-headed, lion-chested, hippo-rumped Devourer (or big boss), and so completing his mission. Along the way, he must fight a whole series of deadly animals and insects, collect magical talismans (amulets to keep evil beings out of the burial chamber, a magic brick with a reed stuck in to breathe through should the tomb fill up with sand) and complete various side-missions, while all the time remembering to eat, drink and monitor life force levels. Two very different cultures' very similar answers to the question "Is this all there is?"

If the netherworld is a computer game, the Book of the Dead is a set of 'cheats'. In fact, the objects gathered here suggest the ancient Egyptian upper classes were idle, selfish fibbers of the highest order. It wasn't piety or good works that got you waved through the netherworld, it was *heka*, the magical use of a word or image: just reading out an entity's name from your Book was normally enough to overpower it. You did need to get your heart weighed before you could pass through to the Field of Reeds, but Osiris wasn't as all-seeing as St Peter at the Pearly Gates – even Santa Claus is probably a better judge of character. All you required to guarantee a favourable judgement was a heart-scarab amulet and spell 30B instructing your heart not to tell on you. It was thanks to this underhand ruse that Nodjmet's Book could show her being judged good, even though she was involved in the political murder of two policemen and so by rights should have been snapped up in the jaws of the Devourer without a second thought. The power of words over truth is demonstrated by another of the tasks of the netherworld: the deceased had to deny 42 faults to 42 deities, apparently regardless of whether or not they were actually guilty. Revealingly, perhaps, it's thought that this task was derived from a series of declarations priests had to make before entering and working in the temples.



THE BRITISH MUSEUM / BOOK OF THE DEAD PAPYRUS OF HUNIFER, C.1280 BC

The dead had a set of 'cheats' to evade justice

Not only did the dead cheat to win safe passage, but they cheated to get out of doing any work. The papyri show them playing interminable games of *senet*, and they even packed the boards with them in their tombs; admittedly, this was partly because *senet* was a symbol of the journey of death; but it seems likely they were also hoping to get a good amount of gaming in on the other side. They carried with them, too, a set of *shabti* or *ushabti* figures, so that if once they had tricked their way into paradise and were asked to do any manual labour, they could magically activate the little statues and set them to work in their stead.

Still, despite the way they bent the afterlife to their own self-interest, no one could accuse the Ancient Egyptians of lacking imagination. The very process of mummification – the removal of bodily organs into jars, the embalming, the bandaging – demonstrates a flair for the macabre, while the papyri depict many acts of strange violence, as when a sun god cat chops the head off a chaos god snake, and many lurid perils of the hereafter. Spell 33 wards off serpents: "O Rerek, snake, take yourself off, Geb and Shu have arisen against you, for you have eaten a mouse, which Ra detests, and you have chewed the bones of a putrid cat." The importance of imagining every one of these possible dangers also leads to some rather gruesome specifics; for instance, not only do you need spells for protection against decapitation and slaughter, but to keep you from a diet of excrement and urine. Such graphic images testify to the horrors of death, which was ever-present for a people destined to die young – on average, at around 35 – and which essentially had to be navigated alone and without priests to intercede. Still, the whole nightmarish effect is rather undermined by just how cute and cartoonish these animal-headed gods and demons look, as well as their evident uselessness: not once is there any suggestion that they might manage to stop the dead getting through the netherworld, and given the gods' failure to wise up to the old heart-scarab amulet trick, it's a wonder the Devourer had quite so much flesh on her mismatched bones.

Ultimately, it's the details in this exhibition, and the way they open onto a vast underworld and the civilisation that created it, that are so compelling. But this very density of detail means it's tricky to see all the exhibits during busy periods, and the lack of background information can be frustrating; the *duat* is never put into the context of a greater supernatural universe, and we never find out what people who couldn't afford a Book of the Dead thought about the afterlife or how they got through it without any spells. Cavils aside, this is an enthralling exhibition, and the Ancient Egyptians emerge as individuals with very human concerns, lively art, a rich belief system, and a rather appealing vision of death as a more exciting state of being alive.

Journey through the afterlife: Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead, runs until 6 March 2011 at the British Museum, London WC1B 3DG. Tickets cost £12 and can be booked from 020 7323 8181 or online at www.britishmuseum.org.

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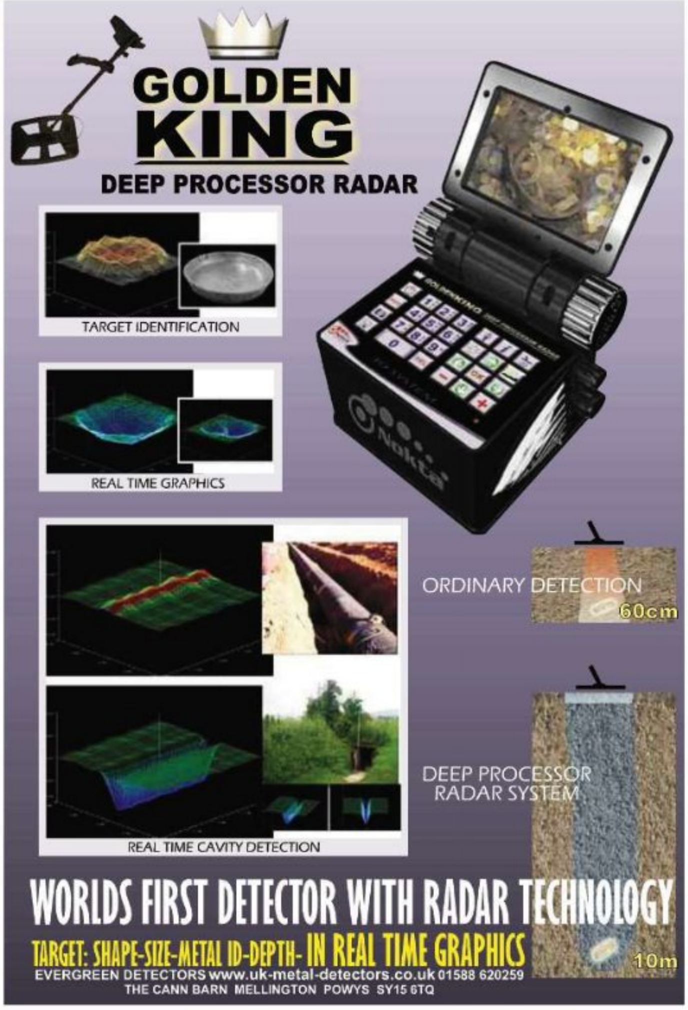
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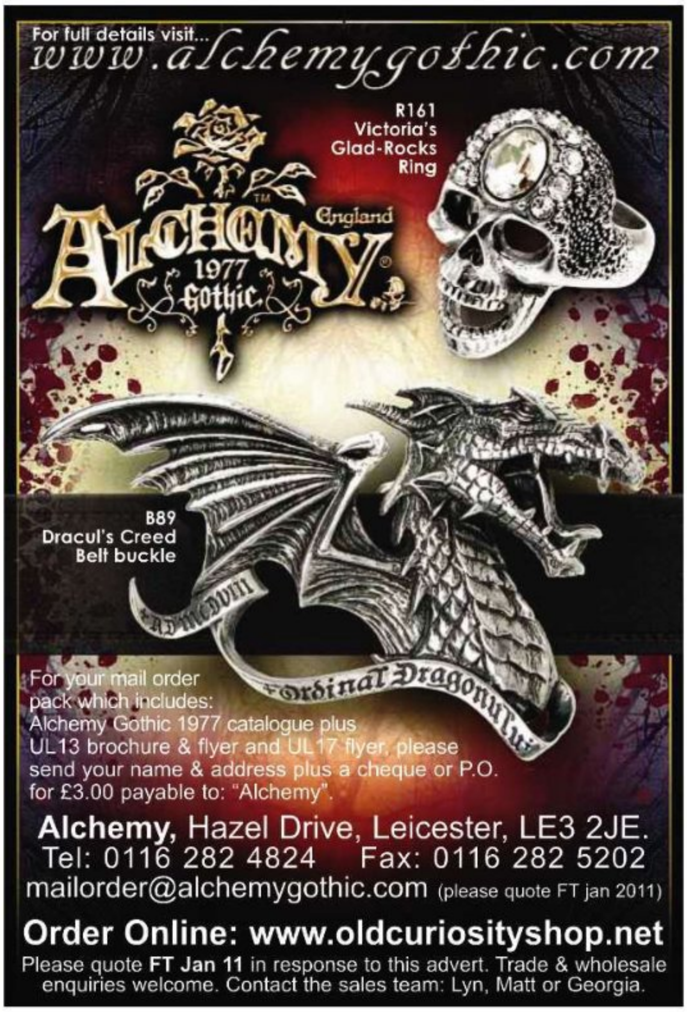
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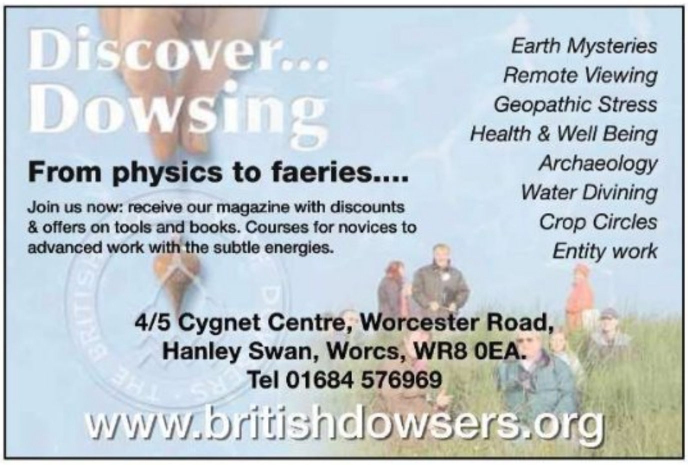
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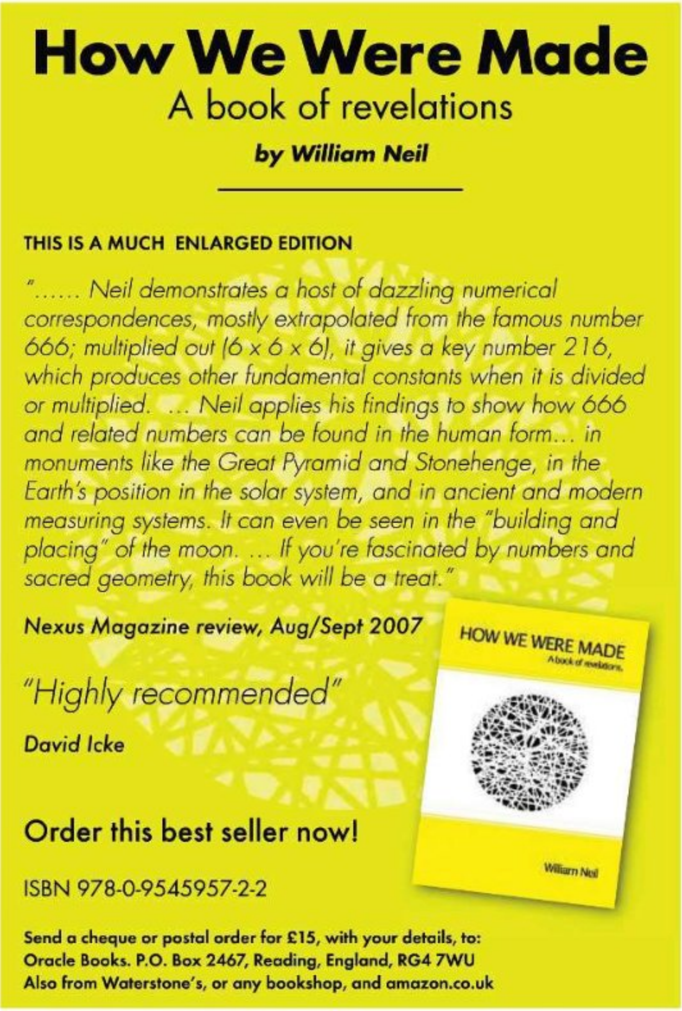
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Nexus Magazine review, Aug/Sept 2007

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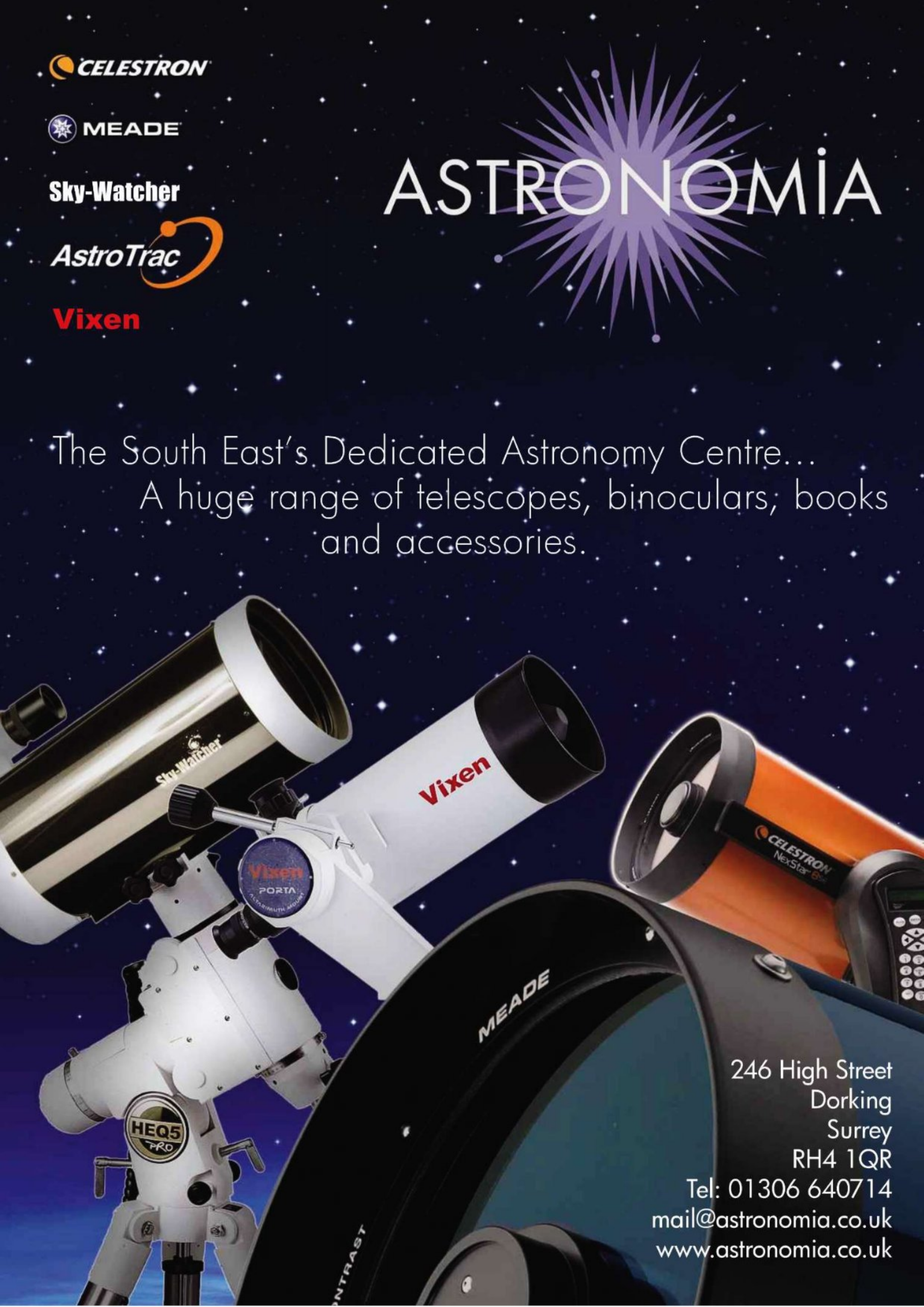

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Dear FT...

letters

Autistic poltergeists?

I was struck again, reading about some poltergeist phenomena ["Renovation Hauntings", **FT268:30–35**], by how similar they are to much of the behaviour characteristic of autism. As I live with a son who has Asperger's Syndrome, the unexplained repetitive noises, door slamming, and moving of household objects certainly rings a bell (no pun intended, but hell – enjoy it anyway!) A more specific example is the experience of Mrs Farris, in Hyde, Greater Manchester, who found her saucepans had been systematically lined up in size order. Such 'lining up' behaviour is very common in people, particularly children, with autism – to the extent that it is used as part of standard diagnostic tests to determine if a child is autistic. Unusual speech patterns, flat intonation and violent outbursts are also common to both phenomena. For the autistic person, these behaviour patterns arise together with, and are linked to, difficulty in identifying how others see them, and how their own actions might impact on other people.

This thought leads me to envisage the glorious scenario that we are in fact surrounded by the spirits of all those who have died, carefully tidying up after themselves and tiptoeing around to make sure they don't disturb the living. Only the autistic dead, still blithely unaware of their effects on others, continue to slam doors and rearrange saucepans, not realising the upset this causes!

A final point: there are numerous cases of poltergeists being 'tamed' by householders simply speaking, 'man to man' with them to explain that they find their activities disturbing and would like them to stop. Again, this is precisely the way to deal effectively with an autistic child whose behaviour is causing concern.

Melody Clarke
Heslington, York

Buddhist barbecue

Andrew Wyles [**FT268:72**] apparently does not realise that the expression 'Budddhist barbecue' is not a Baldwinianism but a quotation from Madam Nhu (the Vietnamese 'Dragon Lady' of that time). In any case, it is mild compared to St Lawrence's remark on his own grilling: "Turn Me Over, this side's done." As to Zarmaros (omitted through exigencies of space, and one example was anyway enough): he is attested in such Greek sources as Nicolaus of Damascus, Strabo, and Dio Cassius, who (bk54 ch9 para10) says some thought his self-immolation just a publicity stunt. *FT* readers wishing to follow up discussions of this character should consult a website called 'The Four Immeasurables'.

Barry Baldwin
By email

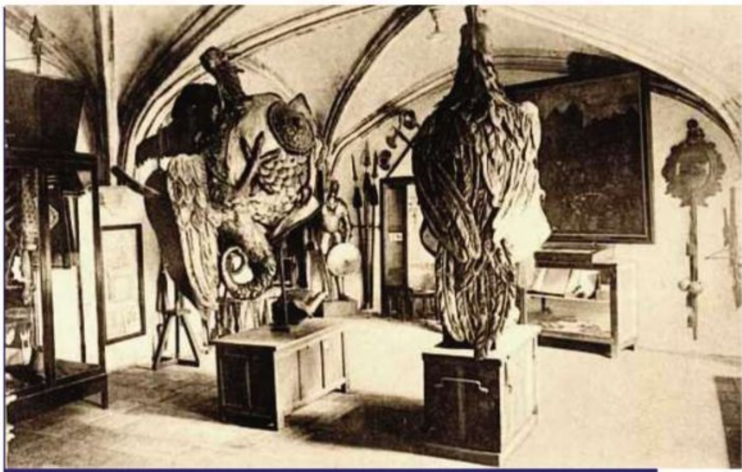
Mischief Night

I was born and brought up in a small village in North Yorkshire, so I found the article on Mischief Night [**FT268:42–44**] very interesting. As I am 55 years old, I've had lots of experience of these annual 'pranks' and I could add a few more like turning signposts round and taking bicycle wheels off and putting them in the village pond along with gates. And – as most people had outside toilets – putting treacle on toilet seats was very popular at one time.

However, the article didn't mention the explanation I was given. November 5th (Bonfire Night) was a Protestant celebration: Guy Fawkes was a Catholic and attempted to blow up the largely Protestant House of Parliament. He was caught leaving the gunpowder to enable this during the night of November 4th, a very mischievous act indeed!

So, one section of society celebrates November 5th and burns effigies of Guy Fawkes in celebration of his capture and the failure of the Gunpowder Plot, while another section celebrates the opposite – Guy Fawkes and the Catholic attempt to destroy Parliament – so mischief night was born. And Guy Fawkes was born in York, which may explain why it's so popular in Yorkshire – not to mention the large number of Catholic abbeys and monasteries there.

Heather MacDougall
By email



Giant helmets

In early June 2010, I purchased this old sepia-tinted picture postcard at the Tuesday bric-a-brac market in Wednesbury, West Midlands. I was – and remain – very intrigued but perplexed by its subject, a pair of extremely ornate and exceptionally large helmets on display in what appears to be a museum or art gallery. Whereas the right-hand helmet takes the form of a huge feathered eagle or similar bird of prey, the one on the left constitutes a winged curly-tailed dragon-like beast gripping a spherical object.

The postcard bears the following simple, if somewhat clumsily worded, caption: "View on the helmets of the Giants", which is also given in French (first) and in German (second). There's no other detail, not even the location of these remarkable-looking exhibits or any printer information. The card has not been used, so there is no writing or stamp to offer any clues as to its age or origin. After spending some time vainly searching for any information regarding the helmets, on 14 June 2010 I included a short account and photo on my ShukerNature blog (http://tinyurl.com/35svur9 – karlshuker.blogspot), and subsequently received a number of interesting suggestions.

The most popular idea was that the helmets were theatrical props for some early 20th-century stage production, which is certainly possible, though to my mind they seem too sturdy in appearance to be lightweight constructions. In contrast, Danish cryptozoologist Lars Thomas opined that they may be genuine, revealing a most interesting snippet of historical information that could be relevant: namely, that according to legend, Alexander the Great always left behind giant helmets and weapons following one of his conquests, in order to scare off any challengers and to keep those conquered by him in a subdued state. Lars vaguely recalls reading somewhere that some of these giant Alexandrian helmets were displayed in various early museums. If true, this could indeed explain my baffling postcard, but I would have thought that if such spectacular exhibits exist, they would be very famous; yet no one who has seen my postcard recognises them, or their setting. For now, therefore, my quest for information continues. Any suggestions or information would be greatly welcomed. Answers on a postcard – but not this one!

Karl Shuker *Wednesbury, West Midlands*

letters

Psychobabble?

I carefully read Peter Brookesmith's Forum piece on Budd Hopkins [**FT268:54–44**], hoping for fresh insight on so-called abduction reports. What I found was two pages of pompous and pointless psychobabble that reflected Brookesmith's personal prejudice. Hopkins's methodology has been criticised, but there was no discussion of that, nor any comparison with the contributions on the subject by other writers or researchers.

I have not delved deeply into abduction/missing time phenomena, but am not prepared to dismiss claims out of hand. On occasion, I have listened to first-hand accounts, sometimes on a one-to-one basis, that could only be described as *seriously strange*. Some of these accounts have remained outside the public domain, so the claimant was not seeking publicity.

Why would seemingly normal people describe personal experiences (that you wouldn't want to include on a CV) that are way outside normal human experience? I have been called a cynical old fart, but find it worrying when people attack researchers, rather than talking directly to witnesses.

Lionel Beer
Hampton, Middlesex

Peter Brookesmith responds: Mr Beer wonders why my Forum piece did not dwell on Hopkins's methods (or those of others). But in *Art, Life & UFOs* – the focus of the article – Hopkins barely discusses them. Actually, everything that Mr Beer complains is missing from my article is missing from the book. Could the one explain the other? Mr Beer implies that I dismiss abduction claims out of hand. I do not; they intrigue me, as Mr Beer is beginning to do.

I do dismiss the notion that little grey ET aliens have anything to do with them, and have enunciated the reasons why at monumental length, in these very pages and elsewhere. Send SAE for full list of references. Mr Beer also appears to think – although the thought has nothing to do with the drift of my article – that I have not spoken directly to *soi-disant* abductees. Several acres of my 1998 book *Alien Abductions* stand in evidence that I have.

Mr Beer sees no "fresh insight" in my piece, whereas I find plenty (albeit unconscious) that's new to think about in Budd Hopkins's book, and had stumbled into thinking that that was what I had dared to recount. If Hopkins doesn't come out of my article very well, it is because he doesn't come very well out of his own memoir. Reporting what one finds scarcely amounts to an attack, and others seem to share my view.

I might quote fellow reviewer Dan Schneider, who has rather less time for Abstract Expressionist art ("the whole movement was a sham") than I do, and enquires: "Dear Lord, has there ever been an autobiography or memoir where the author was so painfully clueless as to the correlation between his words and the things they describe?"

Mr Beer should read Hopkins's book for himself and see. If, meanwhile, he fails to comprehend the entanglement of Hopkins's character, his art, and his naïve promotion of alien abductions as objective occurrences, I decline to take the blame.

"Are you *sure* this is Christmas Island?"

JOHN ROBERT DOCHERTY

Caterham ghost

Regarding the Caterham bypass 'ghost' tale [**FT267:16**], there are some factors that make the story seem less mysterious. Despite the bypass's appearing remote, there is a cycle path running alongside the A22, coming up from Godstone towards Whyteleafe, which is used occasionally by pedestrians; and although the south/west side of the road is tree-lined, there are houses close behind the trees (which are more of a line than a wood) for much of the route, plus a travellers' residential site to the south of Caterham, also near the A22. Thus to see a person on foot in the area is not unusual, even late at night.

But what of the police helicopter and apparent lack of facial features in the figure seen? Not so long ago, about the time of the report, a group of cunning types, using the policy of hiding in plain sight, grew a cannabis crop alongside the Caterham bypass. If the police were trying to catch them in the act, the "supernatural" excuse after use of a helicopter might have been an attempt to prevent the growers suspecting that the police were onto them. And the "missing face" individual seen could perhaps have been a grower deliberately concealing their features (a stocking mask, for example).

Simon McInnes
Caterham, Surrey

Newbury Bypass ghosts

The section on road construction in "Renovation Hauntings" [**FT268:30–35**] reminded me of an incident that happened during the Newbury bypass protests in the winter of 1996/97. A group of security guards – I think they were employed by Pinkerton's – reported seeing several 'ghosts' that, when chased, vanished into the mist.

I was involved in the protest and remember finding this report quite amusing. I also remember how easy it was to disappear in that landscape if that was your aim.

Oliver Nutkins
Brighton, East Sussex

Postcard ghost

The Wem girl ghost photo [**FT265:14**] may be proof, not disproof, that it is genuine. This girl was born around the same time as the town hall's construction; she lived on or near the same street; and she was 'immortalised' on a commercially produced postcard, a fact she was probably aware of. If the trauma of the fire made her spirit return, what form would it take? Most likely the form she was known as in her lifetime and would be recognised as: the postcard girl (like Neo's residual self image in *The Matrix*).

Shockadelic
Sydney, Australia

THE WORLD'S WEIRDEST NEWS STORIES
Fortean Times
JESUS IN BRITAIN
AND DID THOSE FEET... WALK TO STONEHENGE?
TATTOOS FROM THE BLUE
VERY LITTLE GREEN MEN
THE ORGONITE EXPERIMENT

Portraying Jesus

Who was that blue-eyed, chestnut-haired hippie on the cover of **FT261**? Surely not Jesus of the "Jesus in Britain" story? Jesus (or Yoshua bin Yussif, as he would probably have called himself) came from the Middle East, spoke Aramaic, and was probably fairly short, dark-haired and dark-eyed. An American politician once famously made a fool of himself by saying, during a debate on Spanish-language support programmes, "If English was good enough for Jesus Christ, then it's good enough for me." *FT* should be in the business of exploring the Universe with open-minded curiosity and enthusiasm. It should not be recycling stupid, dated and racist stereotypes.

Yowann Byghan
Dunscore, Dumfries & Galloway, Alba/Scotland

David Sutton responds: The "blue-eyed, chestnut-haired hippie" was a tongue-in-cheek composite, incorporating a younger version of the blonde-haired, blue-eyed Christ of bad Victorian prints and children's Bibles, a more recent icon, the 1970s Glastonbury Festival-goer, and a touch of the tree-hugging modern Druid. It was intended to be allusive rather than 'accurate', and could obviously no more be a 'true' representation of Christ than other (one presumes equally flawed) works by, say, Leonardo, Delacroix or Stanley Spencer, not to mention those of the countless, nameless masters of stone carving and stained glass who decorated Europe's great cathedrals and churches. Perhaps, in the interests of accuracy, we'd have been better off repeating the only known 'photograph' of Jesus – the one taken by the time-travelling Benedictine exorcist Father Ernetti using his Chronovisor [see **FT165:30–36**].

Not so final

I read the obituary of F Gwynplaine MacIntyre [**FT268:26–27**] with interest. There is one thing I would take issue with: that his review of *Metropolis* indicated that he was saying goodbye. The quote has been taken out of context to give it an elegiac feel, whereas actually it gives no hint of what was to come.

The review begins: "'Metropolis' is my all-time favourite movie, so I've saved this for the last review that I plan to write for this wonderful website IMDb. I've enjoyed sharing my experiences of the movies I've seen, but now I'm moving on to other passions." And the final paragraph reads: "Nitrate film stock doesn't last forever, and all good things come to a happy ending. This is my last review here. I'll keep watching movies, but other passions are important to me as well. Thank you, IMDb, and thank you to everyone who has read my reviews. I will happily rate 'Metropolis' a full 10 out of 10." That doesn't sound like someone saying goodbye because he is about to kill himself.

Tom Ruffles
By email

Iraq War workings

In "The Magical Battle Of Britain" [**FT267:34–41**], Dave Evans and David Sutton ask: "[W]ho, if anyone, is doing magic regarding the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and to what ends?"

I came across the following snippet on the Internet, in a comment on a video about the (unrelated, but spooky) 'Wyoming Incident' TV interception hoax:

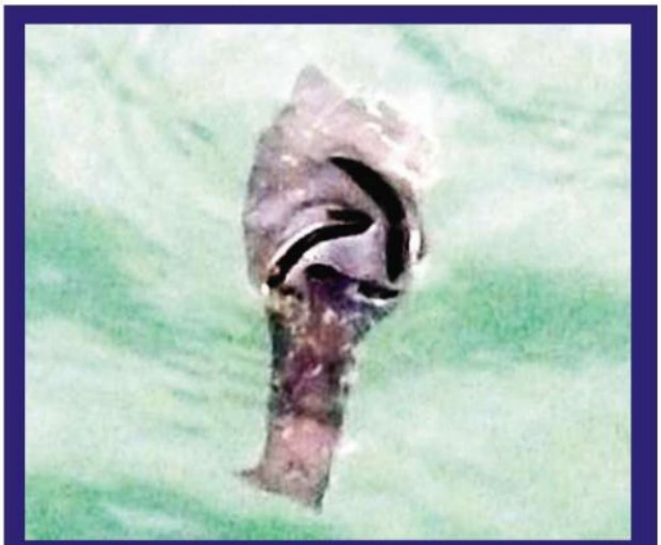
"In occult circles, the number 333 is associated with an 'entity' (which exists if you believe in it, and does not, if you don't) called 'Choronzon'. It was once described in various magickal texts (notably by Aleister Crowley) as a demon that is 'the most dreaded of all the forces of evil'. There are others who find Choronzon more complex and interesting than a 'devil'. Two of them decided to use it as a name for a project… a music project, though it's more than just a 'band'. I believe these videos might be a bit of fallout from that project even though their creators do not likely know this (unless someone told them!)

"A few years ago, there was an extended 'working' called New World Chaos… in which these two individuals – one based in California, one in Florida, enacted a program for this entity Choronzon to follow… one that was supposed to bring about various subtle changes to the subconscious American under-mind.

"Essentially, various cultural fabrics of the USA were to become unravelled – particularly the ones involved with mindless patriotism and monotheism. Other threads were to knit themselves. It was all supposed to implant via this entity Choronzon – or just the IDEA of Choronzon, maybe? – into the country's mass mind.

"The event had many results. There was a distinct anti-Bushist slant to this particular work and so it is rather interesting to note that the House resolution to impeach Bush ended up being H.R. 333. The year that the ritual was done was the year Katrina happened and at that point the tide of public opinion, which had run in majority favor of Bush and of the war in Iraq, did turn, in that year, to the opposite pole. It is one of the most successful magickal workings in recent times, and these hoax videos are yet more evidence that there was some effect, albeit scattered, from the strange doings of this pair. It makes one wonder what could happen were they truly focused… or if there were more individuals involved."

James Hedges
London



Thing in the water

At 4pm on 24 July 2010, my son Joseph, along with his girlfriend and two passing French cyclists, saw this creature about 10ft (3m) below a bridge over a channel that connects the Mediterranean with the inland salt-water Bassin de Thau near Marseillan. The creature, no more than 15in (38cm) long, was heading from the sea toward the lake, propelling itself by moving two black flippers from side to side. It was clearly seen for some time.

When first shown the pictures, I said it was probably a bin liner or carrier bag, but Joseph was certain that it was animate, swimming and not a piece of drifting flotsam. Any ideas what it could be? My own guess would be a cuttlefish or possibly a seal that had been damaged by a motorboat – or maybe it's something unknown and undescribed.

Simon Matthews *By email*

Sister Morphine

Re: the Mythchaser about morphine addiction [**FT266:17**], let's consult the master of morphine and chronicler of cold turkey, Mr William Burroughs. In his memoir of the addict's life, *Junky* (Ace Books, 1953), he blasts the image of "One shot and you're hooked!!!" out of the cooking-up water: "It takes at least three months' shooting twice a day to get any habit at all… I think it no exaggeration to say it takes about a year and several hundred injections to make an addict."

With a regular supply of pure morphine, you could sustain a healthy (!) habit for many years. Burroughs even theorises that an opiate habit keeps you young. It's all to do with cellular regeneration, apparently… Maybe this is the reason for the medical profession's unwillingness to supply it: we're all aware of the pensions crisis and the pressure on public services.

Older readers will recall that heroin could be legally prescribed in Britain until 1972. Anybody seen *Summer Holiday*?

Lucy Brooke
Hedon, East Yorkshire

it happened to me...

Have you had strange experiences that you cannot explain?
We are always interested in reading of odd events and occurrences.
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First-hand accounts from *FT* readers and browsers of www.forteantimes.com

A lifetime's ghosts

My grandfather, who walked with a limp, died before I was born. One night, my uncle babysat me while my parents went out. When they came home, I was lying in my cot in the front bedroom upstairs. Suddenly there were thudding noises across the landing, like someone walking with a limp, and my dad was convinced it sounded like my grandfather's footsteps.

When I was small, I used to share a bedroom with my sister. Every time I was poorly, she would take me into my mum's room. One night I wasn't feeling very well, and my mum woke up to see me standing at the foot of her bed with a young girl, who had her arms around me. She thought my sister had taken me into her room, but she hadn't. Mum took her eyes off me for a second and the girl had gone.

When I was eight or nine and out playing with my brother, I saw an image of an airship and ever since then they have fascinated me. I have seen ghosts from time to time since then.

I was lying in bed one night aged about 10 when I saw my mongrel dog Candy, who was run over when I was eight and was buried in the garden. She rolled up in a ball and fell asleep, and then she vanished. I can clearly remember sitting in an empty form room at school with a friend, when I felt something tugging hard at the front of my jacket. It was as if someone wanted my attention, and the tugging persisted until I told my friend what was happening. She was so scared she ran out of the classroom.

I was still seeing ghosts at the age of 17. One night, I woke up with a start in the early hours and when I turned over, I saw a male figure, matching the description of my grandfather, standing by the bedside. I couldn't see the background, as everything was white around him. He stood there for a few seconds, then went away.

ETIENNE GILFILLAN

One cold January morning recently, I was visiting Ulverscroft Manor [a 300-year-old country manor house in Charnwood Forest, Markfield, Leicestershire] with a group of wheelchair users from Rawlins College [in Quorn, Leicestershire]. When we arrived, we went into the lounge and sat in a semi-circle around the fire. I glanced up and noticed a blur in between two wheelchairs as large as life! It was a young boy dressed in a grey blazer with short grey trousers and white tights. He was standing sideways to me, looking away from me, and was surrounded with a white mist. As I looked at him, he disappeared into thin air suddenly, leaving me looking at the floor, feeling somewhat overwhelmed but elated, not scared. It gave me a sense of privilege to have seen him. I wrote to the chief executive of Ulverscroft Manor and told him about what I had seen. He replied that over the past few years people had sensed a bad presence upstairs on the landing.

Sometimes I have felt the presence of ghosts without actually seeing them. For example, in the middle of the night, in bed, I have sometimes felt that my dad (who died six years ago) was there, putting his arms around me in a kind of reassuring way.

Another time, I awoke in the night to find a monk standing at the bottom of my bed. Two weeks later, I was admitted to the Royal Infirmary. I think that the monk was a warning sign.

All that I experienced and witnessed seemed very apparent to me but not to others.

Hayley Smith
Anstey, Leicestershire

Editor's note: Hayley Smith is 40 years old. She suffers from Friedreich's Ataxia (diagnosed at the age of 10) and is almost completely paralysed. In particular, she has great difficulty in speaking. She lost her mobility when she was a teenager. The above account was transcribed by Morry van Ments, who works with the Ryder-Cheshire Volunteers.

I saw two boys wearing Edwardian-style sailor suits and with blond pageboy haircuts

Ghostly brothers

The following happened when I was in my early 20s and down for the weekend from university, visiting my older sister. As there was no guestroom in her Victorian terrace house, I crashed the night on the lounge floor, comfortable on big cushions pulled off the sofa. Comfortable yes, but restless. There was a bright streetlight just outside the window and it shone through the thin curtains. I couldn't sleep. About one o'clock, I was thinking of getting up and finding a book to read. I rolled onto my back and saw two boys standing at my right side, looking down at me. They were wearing Edwardian-style sailor suits and had blond pageboy haircuts. One looked about eight years old, the other about 10. I 'knew' they were brothers straight away. I sensed no malevolence, just curiosity. Nonetheless it scared the bejezus out of me!

At that time in my life, ghosts didn't fit my worldview. I closed my eyes in denial. I lay for a while too petrified to move to the light switch or to open my eyes in case they were still there. I tried to believe it was just a dream, but one knows – once a dream ends – when it was a dream. Then I was convinced they were real: when I had shut my eyes, I had seen a negative image fading on my retinas. An image in a dream would just vanish, but a real object reflects light. When I eventually dared look again, they were gone, but I had no more sleep that night.

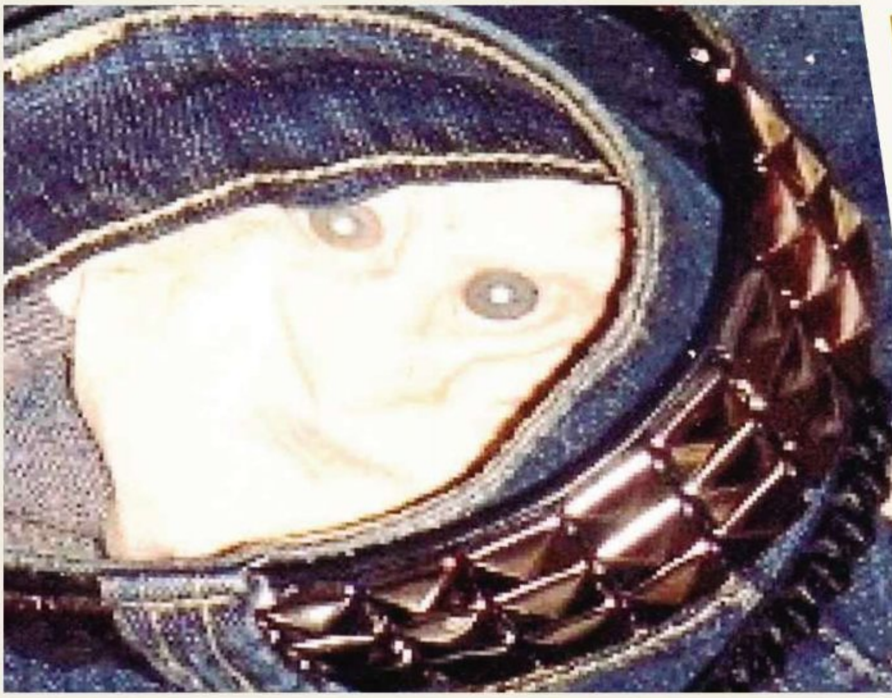
With some embarrassment, I told my sister about the vision. She believed me. Later, I discovered from old newspapers in the local library that two boys had died of consumption in that house in Edwardian times. Their mother had died in hospital shortly before that and I guess the boys had not had the news before they died. I think they were still waiting for her to come home. I didn't stay again for some time. When I did, my sister told me she had sometimes been saying, to 'the house', "your mother has gone on, you must follow." It seemed to do the trick, as I never felt uneasy there again.

Derek Wood
Cambridge

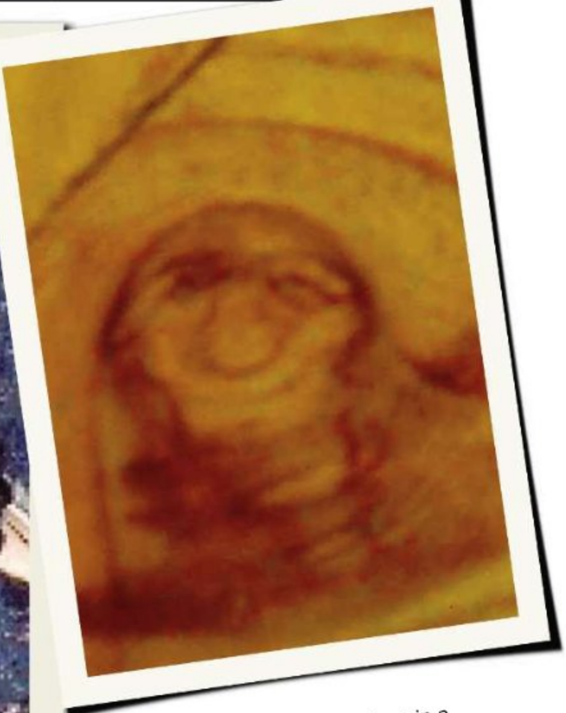
simulacra corner

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409 or to sieveking@forteantimes.com. If your photo is published, we'll send you an exclusive *Fortean Times* gift.

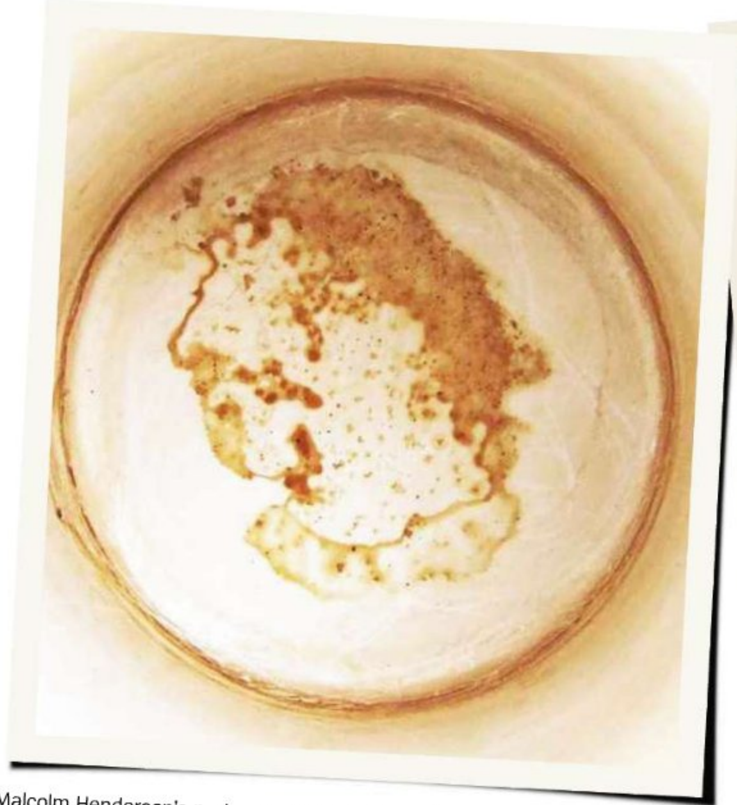
A selection of faces in unlikely places sent in by FT's observant readers.



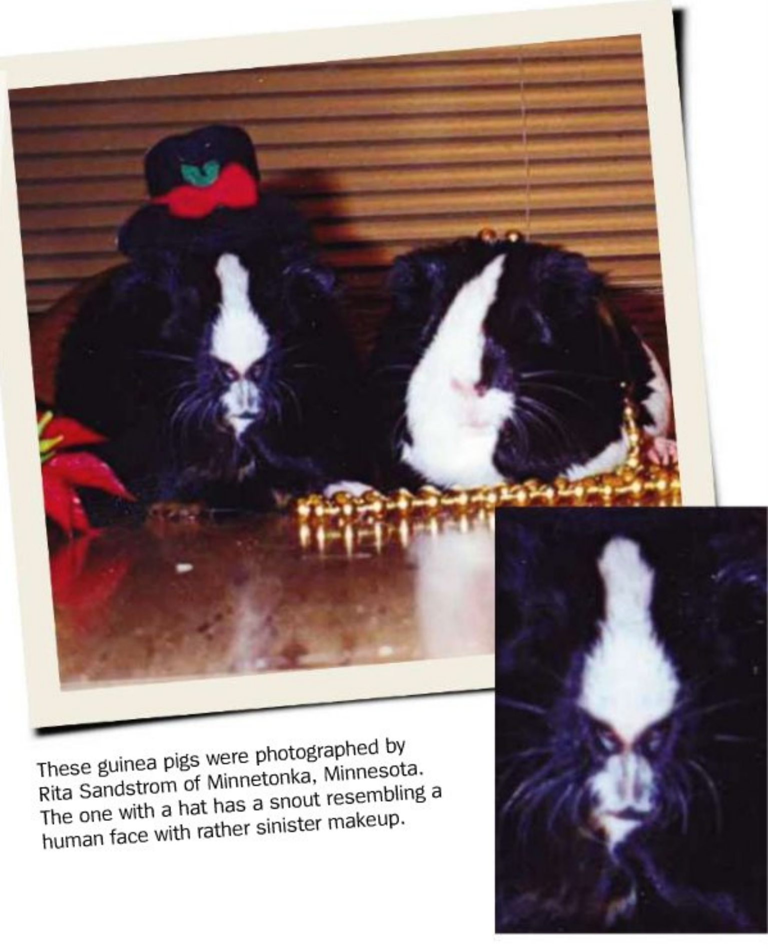
Sarah Jones took her jeans off and threw them on the floor, only to turn round and see this face staring up at her. "It scared the life out of me," she said.



Simon Cochrane noticed this face in a wooden window frame in the staff lavatory where he works, and thought it looked like a smiling Mother Teresa.



Malcolm Henderson's partner, Nady Baker, found this face in the bottom of her mug. The picture was taken by their friend Rudolf Muff.



These guinea pigs were photographed by Rita Sandstrom of Minnetonka, Minnesota. The one with a hat has a snout resembling a human face with rather sinister makeup.

FORTEAN TRAVELLER

73. Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp

Stranded in Florida courtesy of a volcanic ash cloud, **GARY LACHMAN** takes a side trip and discovers the spirits of the South.

THE CASSADAGA SPIRITUALIST
PSYCHIC THERAPY CENTER
Palm • Card Spiritual Readings
WELCOME TO CASSADAGA CERTIFIED
PSYCHIC MEDIUMS ON DUTY
CERTIFIED MEDIUMS
Information
OFFICE
FATHER CHRISTOPHER IS IN
WALK-INS ARE WELCOME
KATHY IS HERE
LISA IS HERE

GARY LACHMAN

ABOVE: Cassadaga's resident mediums and psychics announce their availability.

It's not often that a volcano interferes with my travel plans, but in April 2010, that's exactly what happened. When Iceland's Eyjafjallajökull volcano erupted (see **FT263:55**), sending a dense ash cloud over Europe and closing UK airspace, I was about to return to London from the US after a week's work in Florida. What I was doing in Florida in the first place was unusual enough. I'd been invited to teach at Trinity Preparatory School in Orlando, as part of their Visiting Writers Program. Robert Boerth, an English teacher at the school and head of the programme, was familiar with my books, and had arranged for me to lead classes in esotericism, consciousness, and the history of the 1960s counterculture. These saw me lecturing on Gnosticism and Swedenborg for a religious studies class, on mysticism and 'higher consciousness' to psychology students, and on hippies, communes, and LSD to a history class. I even sat in on two seventh-grade history classes that were researching the 1960s and 70s, and was charmed when one 10-year-old told me he was 'studying' Woodstock, the mother of all rock festivals. Another was doing 'punk rock'. For a conservative Episcopalian school, I thought, they sure taught some radical stuff!

When my flight to Heathrow was cancelled, the school put me up for the duration at a hotel near the huge University of Central Florida campus. I was grateful for the room, but although comfortable, the hotel was in the middle of what seemed an endless strip-malled nowhere, like some Ballardian nightmare. With little more than shopping plazas and gated communities stretching into the distance, and having run out of reading material, I was faced with the prospect of having to entertain myself for an unspecified length of time. So when Robert suggested we visit Cassadaga, the "South's Oldest Spiritualist Community", I was intrigued and immediately said yes.

COLBY'S SPIRIT CAMP

Cassadaga, which is a Seneca Indian word meaning "water beneath the rocks", was founded in 1875 by the trance medium George P Colby, although almost another 20 years passed before the Southern Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp Meeting Association received its official charter in 1894. Colby was born in Pike, Alleghany County, New York, in 1848, the same year that the Fox sisters famously started the spiritualism craze that quickly spread across North America and Europe. As a toddler, Colby moved around – first to Indiana, then to Minnesota, where his mediumistic abilities first appeared. Colby's parents were Baptists, and at the age of 12, he was baptised in a frozen lake during a particularly cold winter. The family had to cut a hole deep into the ice to perform the sacrament, and it seems to have sent Colby into a near-death experience. He claimed that his dead uncle came to him and informed him that he was a medium and that he would one day found a centre for spiritualism in the South. Soon after, Colby's talents manifested in clairvoyant abilities and spirit healing – the 'laying on of hands'.

At 17, while working as a tailor, Colby was sent into a deep trance by a 'band' of spirit guides, something his Baptist parents weren't too keen on. He left the church, and by his 20s was working in public as a medium, a not unusual occupation in America at that time. By the late 1860s, Colby was travelling throughout Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, giving readings and holding séances. His speciality was convincing sceptics of the truth of spiritualism, his various 'guides' providing incontrovertible evidence of the reality of the afterlife. Like other spirit guides, Colby's were multilingual, and he passed on their communications in French, German, Swedish, and other languages. Colby's performances were so popular that many attendees had to be turned away, and he developed a reputation as the "Seer of Spiritualism". At one séance, he is reported to have contacted no less than 300 spirits. (As they were disembodied, there was no difficulty fitting them into the auditorium.)

Colby's most frequent guide was a Native American Indian named Seneca, but a few others also put in appearances. There was a German scholar known as 'the Philosopher', a healer named Wandah, and the voluble Professor Huffman, whose speciality was public speaking. In 1875, at a séance in Iowa, Seneca instructed Colby to visit the spiritualist TD Giddings in Wisconsin. He did, and during a séance with Giddings, Seneca told Colby that he must travel with Giddings and his family – Mrs Giddings was a well-known

SPIRITUALIST ST
MEDIUMSHI

GARY LACHMAN

ABOVE: Even the street names reflect the nature of the community.

medium too – to Florida. Here, Seneca told him, he would found the spiritualist centre his uncle had spoken of years before.

The group took a train to Jacksonville, which was as far south as the railway went then. From there, they travelled by boat to Blue Springs Landing, little more than an outpost in the lush Florida wilderness. Seneca then guided Colby through the subtropical forest until they reached a spot Colby recognised from one of his séances. The area was unusual because of its small, rolling hills – most of Florida is flatter than last week's Perrier – and Colby knew he had reached the end of his journey. Soon after this he secured the land. In 1880, he filed a homestead claim, and in 1884 the grant came through. Along with settling land for his spiritualist centre, Colby's guides told him his health would improve by moving to Florida, not uncommon medical advice today. He suffered from tuberculosis and damaged vocal cords, and Seneca told him he could cure himself by drinking spring water and inhaling pine smoke, an example of the 'eclectic medicine' – an early form of 'alternative healing' – popular in the US then and with many of Cassadaga's early inhabitants. Seneca was right; Colby's vocal cords healed, his TB disappeared, and in 1881 he was off again on another whistle-stop spiritualist tour of 17 states, holding séances in Washington Territory (it became a state in 1889), Oregon, and California. In 1884, he settled for a time in San Francisco, where he lectured and performed to packed houses.

It was at one of these meetings that Colby met the spiritualist EW Bond – one-time mayor of Willoughby, Ohio – who suggested he invite spiritualists from Lily Dale, "the town that talks to the dead",[1] in upstate New York, to help him in setting up his spiritualist community. Touted as "the world's largest centre for spiritual development and the practice of spiritualist religion",[2] the Lily Dale Assembly started as a spiritualist camp in 1879, and is still going strong today, having since been incorporated into a town that has become a New Age tourist site (see **FT205:30–37**). The name Cassadaga comes from the Cassadaga Lakes near Lily Dale, hence Colby's spiritualist community was christened the Southern Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp.

> **Some people call it the psychic centre of the world**

The idea for the camp was to provide a winter haven for Northern spiritualists eager to escape the blistering winter cold. Surprisingly, Colby declined becoming a trustee of the camp, arguing that his talents were not suited to such earthly pursuits. He did sign over 35 acres (14ha) of his land, to which were later added another 22 acres (9ha), giving the site the 57 acres (23ha) it covers today, and in December 1894 the Southern Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp Meeting Association came into existence. Colby became the camp's inspirational speaker and he passed on messages to the Association from his guides. His subsequent years, however, were not easy ones. In 1911, his house burned down – a fate that at different times befell several of the site's original structures – and by the end of his life he was living in near poverty, supported in a small apartment by the community until his death in 1933.

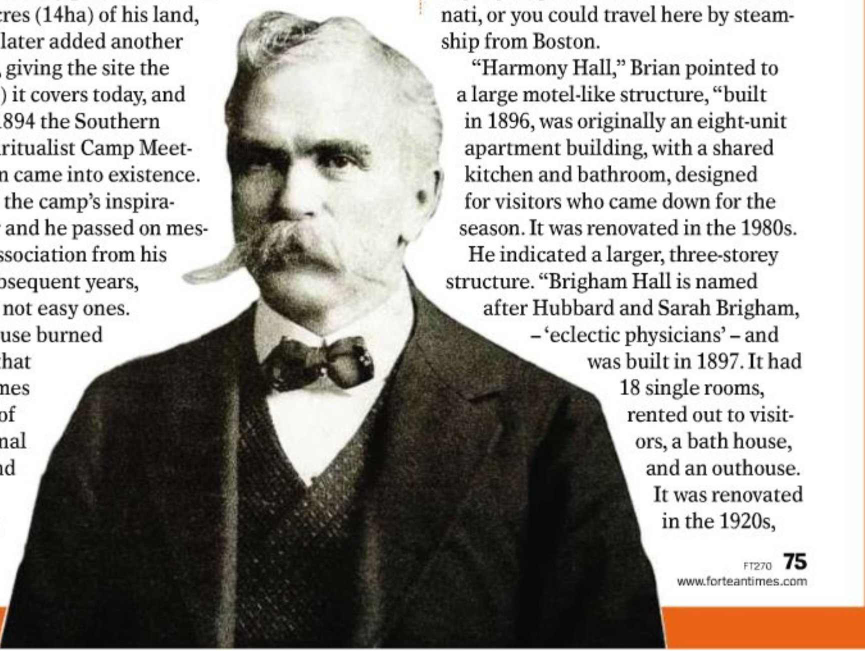
SPIRITS OF THE SOUTH

When we pulled off the motorway, I was surprised that 'Cassadaga' was on the exit sign; not every spiritualist community has its own off-ramp.[3] After a brief drive through the woods – when Colby arrived there were no roads and he had to hack his way through – we passed a few houses advertising 'psychic readings'. Then two white gateposts – dating, we were later told, from the 1890s, remnants of the original site – said "Welcome to Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp".

It was early afternoon in the middle of the week and the place wasn't crowded. We parked near the Andrew Jackson Davis Building, named after the 19th-century American spiritualist, and which serves as a bookshop and welcome centre, with bingo games on Tuesday nights. The lady behind the counter greeted us with a bright "Hello!" and we explained that we were there to meet Reverend Brian Cox, pastor of the Colby Memorial Temple and a certified medium. A minute later, Cox appeared, a sprightly older gentleman casually dressed, wearing dark glasses and adorned with an assortment of spiritual bling – a variety of semi-precious stones, which I later discovered played a large part in the various healing activities performed at the camp. We introduced ourselves and Brian said he was happy to show us around.

As we walked down Stevens Street, Cassadaga's main drag, Brian gave us a short history. "Originally this really was a camp," he said. "George Colby and others were drawn to the area because it's the site of a powerful energy vortex – some people call it the 'psychic centre of the world'. When the meetings first began in the 1890s, they were held in a canvas tent, like a lot of other religious revival meetings at the time. The Colby Memorial Temple, which we'll visit in a moment, was a simple wooden structure, without walls or a floor; it wasn't until the early 20s that the building we have today was built. In the camp's heyday, a special train ran from Cincinnati, or you could travel here by steamship from Boston.

"Harmony Hall," Brian pointed to a large motel-like structure, "built in 1896, was originally an eight-unit apartment building, with a shared kitchen and bathroom, designed for visitors who came down for the season. It was renovated in the 1980s. He indicated a larger, three-storey structure. "Brigham Hall is named after Hubbard and Sarah Brigham, – 'eclectic physicians' – and was built in 1897. It had 18 single rooms, rented out to visitors, a bath house, and an outhouse. It was renovated in the 1920s,



BELOW: George P Colby, who founded the Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp.

but the rooms in the attic were left as storage space, mostly because they're haunted."

"Really?"

"Yep. It seems a ladies' poker club still carries on up there some evenings."

"Any other haunted spots?"

"Oh, lots. This house here," he pointed to a whitewashed 1920s wooden house with a pastel shingled roof and a strange marble bench in front that was covered with an assortment of coins. "It appears that the son of the original occupants liked to play with pennies and often the new tenants would find piles of them covering the floor. They'd clear them up but the next morning they'd find them again."

At the Memorial Temple, Brian was joined by his friend, Richard Smith. Brian explained that the certification for mediums – out of the current 100 Cassadaga inhabitants, 40 are certified mediums – was fairly rigorous, taking from two to 10 years. Brian, who first came to Cassadaga in 1989, got his own certification in 1996. He was ordained a spiritualist minister in 2002, and a healer in 2008. Richard, however, was yet to be certified.

"Are you a rogue, then?" I asked.

"No!" he answered quickly. "But a lot of people think I'm certifiable!"

We laughed.

Inside the temple, which sports a large stage and can seat 500 people, Brian explained that over the years it had been used for a number of purposes, including vaudeville, although today it is mostly used for Sunday religious services and speaking engagements. Music is a great part of the services, and Brian, who has a degree in music, motioned to an all-white baby grand piano – "A gift," he said, "from one of the parishioners."

"Can I take a photograph?"

"Sure. Let me know if you get any orbs."

"Orbs?"

"Yeah. You know, balls of light. Digital cameras pick them up around here all the time. Especially in the old séance room."

The séance room is a closed-off area behind the stage. It was no longer used for séances and wasn't open when we were there. A shame, as I hadn't had any luck with orbs as yet. In *Cassadaga, Florida, Yesterday and Today* by Elizabeth Owens, another of the camp's mediums, I'd read that "[T]he vibrations in the room remain intense due to the amount of ectoplasm that was produced over the years by the mediums." [4] I wished I could have checked it out, but I wouldn't be able to make the Night Orb Photography Tour that evening, which includes a visit to the séance room, and costs $25.00, roughly £15.00. Maybe next volcano.

JUST ORDINARY KOOKS

Outside the temple stands the Caesar Forman Healing Center, a gazebo that was shifted from the nearby woods to act as a private consulting space, and named after one of the camp's healers. Within it, Brian told me, was a "healing chair" whose occupants were asked to complete a "Colby Memorial Temple Healing Statement", which declared the benefit they had derived from the visit. With so much spiritual healing going on, I wondered if they caught any flak from the American Medical Association. "Oh," Brian sighed, "we're pretty much left alone, although at one point because of the laying on of hands we were told we had to get massage licenses. It can be annoying at times."

CAESAR FORMAN HEALING CENTER
CLOSED

GARY LACHMAN

ABOVE: Cassadaga's Caesar Forman Healing Centre.

"Any other trouble?"

I was going to say "with the neighbours" – but as practically everyone in Cassadaga is either a psychic, a medium, or a healer, I realised they had no neighbours!

"Well, we have had some Christian groups drive through town and chuck leaflets out the window, telling us the error of our ways."

"One group," Richard added, "drove through shouting that we were all going to go to Hell. But we just ignored them."

"I don't know what their problem is," Brian said. "We're not doing anything bad. Our beliefs are pretty harmless."

From what I had read about them, I agreed. Cassadaga's "Declaration of Principles" is pretty straightforward. Belief in an "Infinite Intelligence", in the survival of bodily death, in the possibility of contacting those who have 'passed over' into the next dimension, in the Golden Rule, and in individual responsibility. There's nothing I could argue with here, and Brian and Richard seemed like decent, regular folk, not so different from many people I met when working at a New Age bookshop in Los Angeles: maybe a little kooky to some, but really pretty ordinary.

Brian had things to do, so with a hearty handshake he and Richard left us to roam around on our own. The streets were quiet; although there was a playground near Colby Lake, no children were in sight, and the average age of the population was 60ish, I would say. None of the current inhabitants are related to the original settlers, although anyone wanting to buy a home here has to join the Association. The weathered wooden houses, most built in the 1920s, were a welcome change from the anonymous shopping plazas near my hotel. Most of them had modest shingles hanging outside, saying "Medium", "Psychic Healing", or "Metaphysical Instruction"; without these, they'd just be regular houses. Most also said "Closed". We checked out the bookshop, which stocked pretty much what you'd expect from a spiritual emporium – crystals, incense, self-help books – and advertised activities going on in the community, like the classes in "Mediumship and Metaphysics" given by the aptly named William Deep, president of the camp.

Then we crossed the street over to the Cassadaga Hotel. I suspected there was some tension between the hotel and the Cassadagians. Although neither Brian or Richard said as much, I could 'sense' it – maybe this place was an energy vortex, after all. Although the hotel had originally been owned by members of the community, it had passed into private ownership some time ago, and when Robert and I walked in, I could feel the difference. It had a tourist atmosphere that none of the other places, including the bookshop, did. The kitsch was palpable. It was done up in a late 19th-century style, and you could tell it was aimed at the 'ecotourists' who visited after having done Sea World and Disneyworld. On the menu at the "Lost in Time Café", you're reminded to book a reading with "Cassadaga's finest mediums", and if you want your next bash to be an "esoterical blast", you can have a "psychic party", mystically catered, of course. Robert pointed out the "Meditation Station", a wooden cabinet that reminded me of a TARDIS. Within it was incense, a Buddha statuette, and seat. Nearby was the "Spirit Zone", a séance chamber that was being renovated to a conference room. It was closed, but I did get a peek at some gauzy material adorning the walls and had a momentary vision of Floridian businessmen swapping ectoplasm over annual reports.

We ambled around a bit more before heading back to the car. Passing the lake again, I noticed a sign saying "Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp Closed At Sunset". Below this it read "No Alcohol Permitted". That, I thought, made a funny kind of sense. More than likely they have enough spirits there already. **FT**

Many thanks to Robert Boerth, Ben Cox, Richard Smith, and the people of Cassadaga, Florida.
You can check out the Cassadaga home page at http://www.cassadaga.org/.

GARY LACHMAN is a writer on music and the occult, and a regular *FT* contributor. His latest book is *The Quest for Hermes Trismegistus: From Ancient Egypt to the Modern World.*

NOTES

[1] Christine Wicker: *Lily Dale: The True Story of the Town that Talks to the Dead*, HarperOne, 2004.

[2] http://www.lilydale-assembly.com/.

[3] Or its own rock album. The group Bright Eyes released its album *Cassadaga*, named after the community, in April 2007.

[4] *Cassadaga*, Pisces Publishing, 2001, p17.

See also John J Guthrie, Philip Charles Lucas and Gary Monroe (eds): *Cassadaga: The South's Oldest Spiritualist Community*, University of Florida Press, 2000.
Go to www.warnerleisurehotels.co.uk/ for details of 'Discovering Ghosts' and other ghost tours and leisure breaks.

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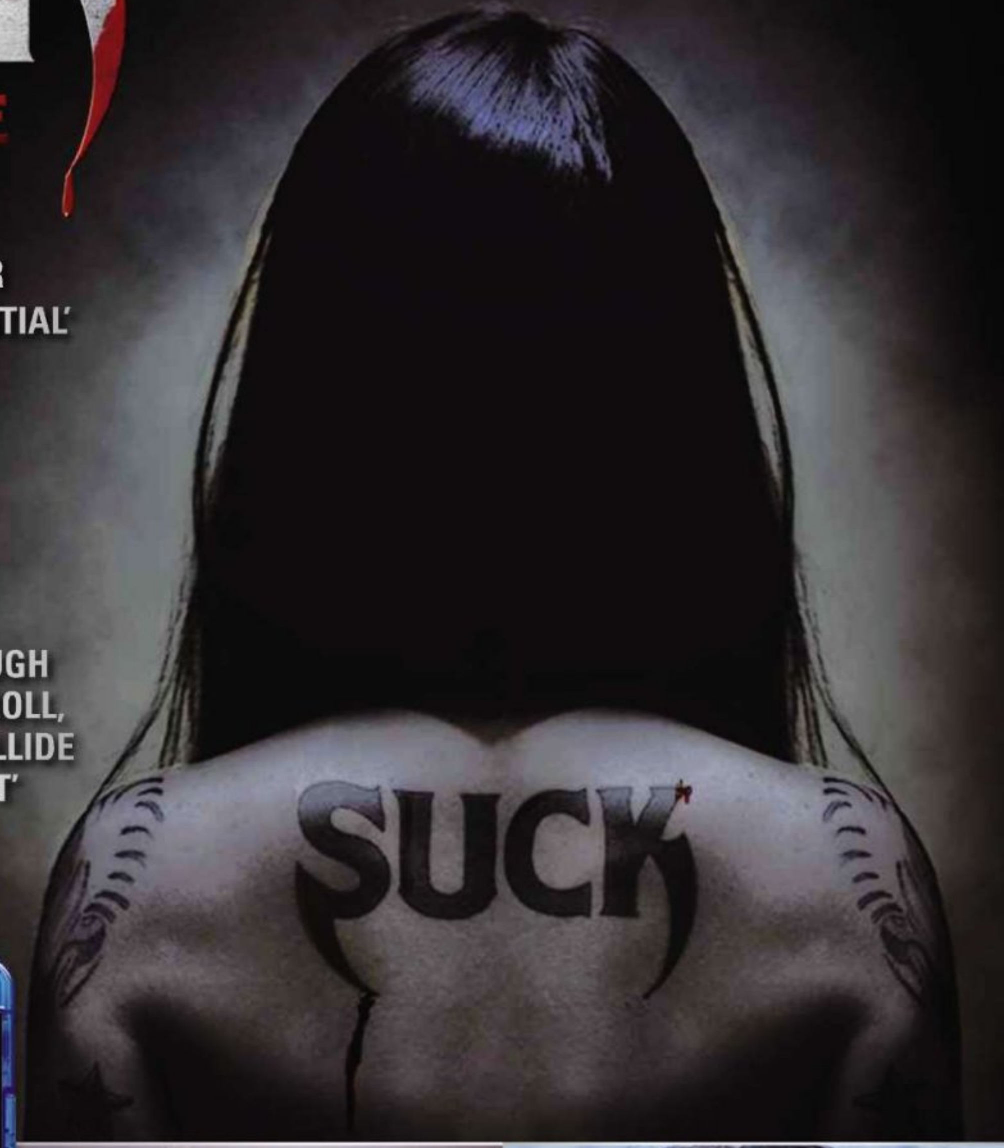

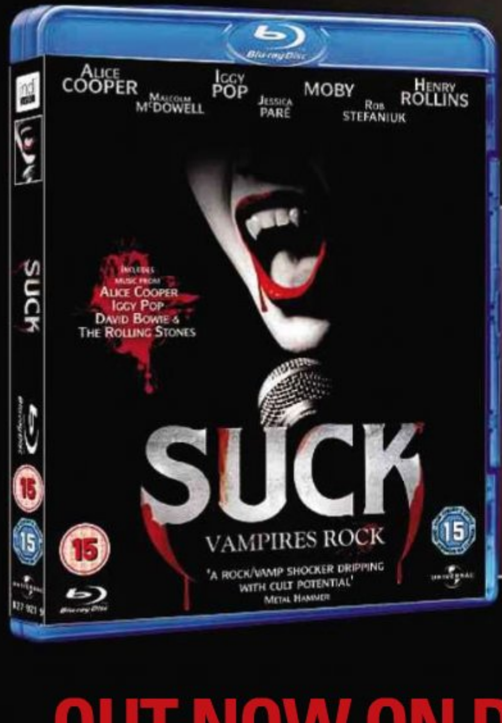
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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data was ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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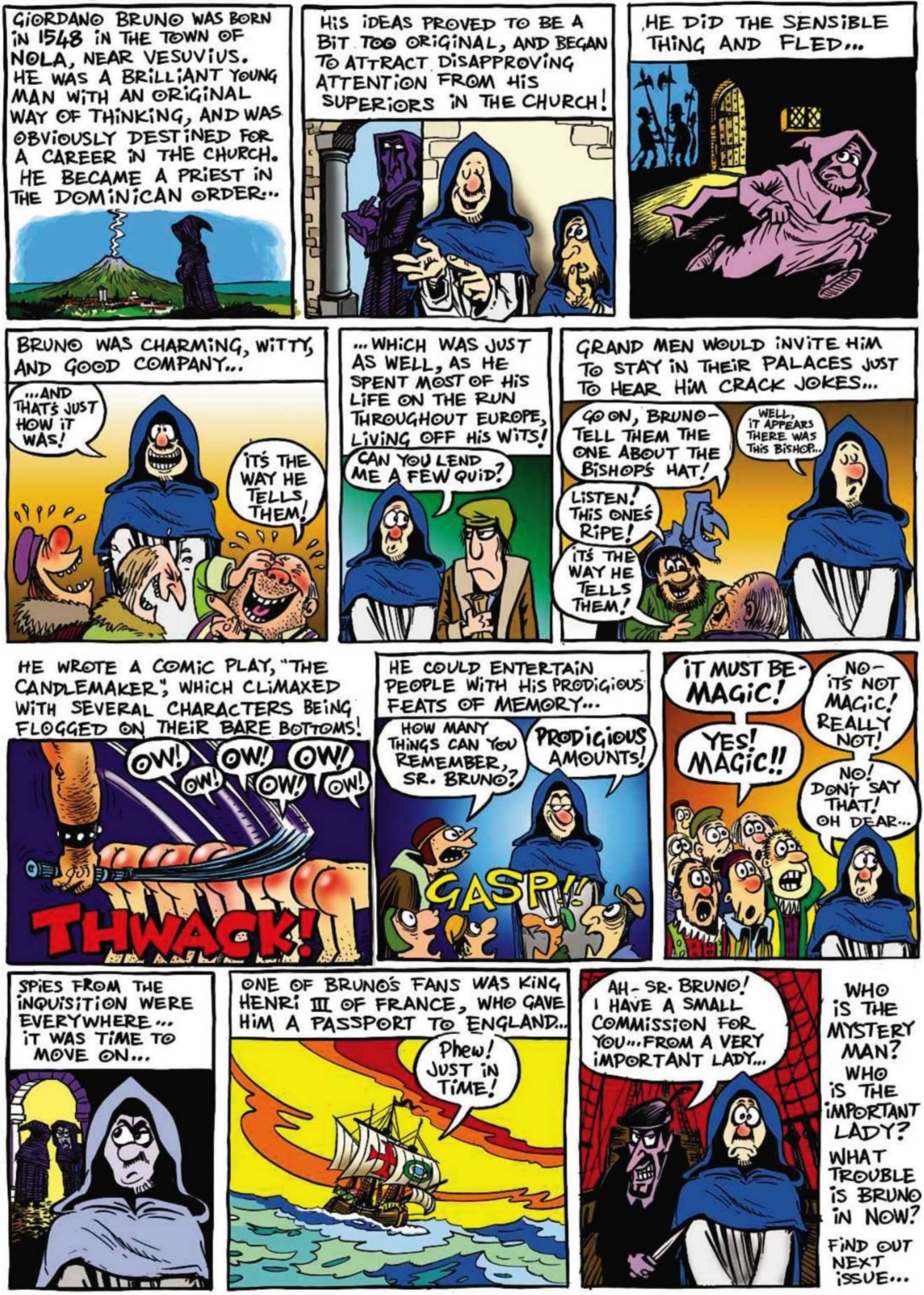
PHENOMENOMIX

The Life of GIORDANO BRUNO Part 2

HUNT EMERSON and KEVIN JACKSON


GIORDANO BRUNO WAS BORN IN 1548 IN THE TOWN OF NOLA, NEAR VESUVIUS. HE WAS A BRILLIANT YOUNG MAN WITH AN ORIGINAL WAY OF THINKING, AND WAS OBVIOUSLY DESTINED FOR A CAREER IN THE CHURCH. HE BECAME A PRIEST IN THE DOMINICAN ORDER...
HIS IDEAS PROVED TO BE A BIT TOO ORIGINAL, AND BEGAN TO ATTRACT DISAPPROVING ATTENTION FROM HIS SUPERIORS IN THE CHURCH!
HE DID THE SENSIBLE THING AND FLED...
BRUNO WAS CHARMING, WITTY, AND GOOD COMPANY...
...AND THAT'S JUST HOW IT WAS!
IT'S THE WAY HE TELLS THEM!
...WHICH WAS JUST AS WELL, AS HE SPENT MOST OF HIS LIFE ON THE RUN THROUGHOUT EUROPE, LIVING OFF HIS WITS!
CAN YOU LEND ME A FEW QUID?
GRAND MEN WOULD INVITE HIM TO STAY IN THEIR PALACES JUST TO HEAR HIM CRACK JOKES...
GO ON, BRUNO— TELL THEM THE ONE ABOUT THE BISHOP'S HAT!
WELL, IT APPEARS THERE WAS THIS BISHOP...
LISTEN! THIS ONE'S RIPE!
IT'S THE WAY HE TELLS THEM!
HE WROTE A COMIC PLAY, "THE CANDLEMAKER", WHICH CLIMAXED WITH SEVERAL CHARACTERS BEING FLOGGED ON THEIR BARE BOTTOMS!
OW! OW! OW! OW! OW! OW!
THWACK!
HE COULD ENTERTAIN PEOPLE WITH HIS PRODIGIOUS FEATS OF MEMORY...
HOW MANY THINGS CAN YOU REMEMBER, SR. BRUNO?
PRODIGIOUS AMOUNTS!
GASP!!
IT MUST BE MAGIC!
NO— IT'S NOT MAGIC! REALLY NOT!
YES! MAGIC!!
NO! DON'T SAY THAT! OH DEAR...
SPIES FROM THE INQUISITION WERE EVERYWHERE... IT WAS TIME TO MOVE ON...
ONE OF BRUNO'S FANS WAS KING HENRI III OF FRANCE, WHO GAVE HIM A PASSPORT TO ENGLAND...
Phew! JUST IN TIME!
AH- SR. BRUNO! I HAVE A SMALL COMMISSION FOR YOU... FROM A VERY IMPORTANT LADY...
WHO IS THE MYSTERY MAN? WHO IS THE IMPORTANT LADY? WHAT TROUBLE IS BRUNO IN NOW?
FIND OUT NEXT ISSUE...

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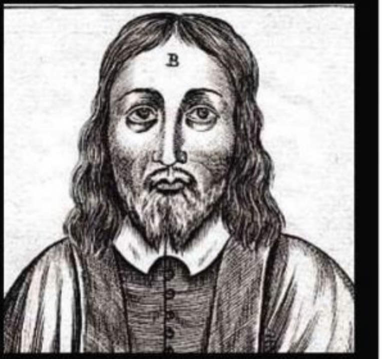

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THE APOCALYPTIC OBSESSIONS OF THE FIRST FRIENDS

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FORTEAN TIMES 271

ON SALE 6 JAN

HUGO PIETTE

TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND *FORTEAN TIMES* FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM *FT*'S PAST.

JANUARY 1981

Most reports of 'spontaneous human combustion' (SHC) seem to come from American, British and less commonly, European sources. Here's a possible oriental SHC. This month, in Singapore, the state coroner recorded an open verdict on the deaths of a Malay woman, Saemah Sapari, and her son Mohammed, aged six. The previous August, they had been rescued by a deliveryman from their seventh-floor, smoke-filled flat. He broke down the door, beat out their flaming clothes, and carried them to safety. Unfortunately, they both died later, but Mrs Sapari had time to make a statement before she expired. She said she had been watching TV when she heard her son shout from his bedroom. Going in, she saw that his bed was on fire. She beat out the flames and carried her son to the staircase. No explanation was given for the conflicting accounts. **FT35:11**

JANUARY 1991

This month all eyes were on Iraq as Saddam defied the UN deadline (on the 15th) for withdrawal of his troops from Kuwait. We had great fun collating the strange portents coinciding with the events. On that day, there was a solar eclipse visible only from the Middle East; and a New Moon in Saturn, which was interpreted by some Western astrologers as signifying "bullets and separation" and "stormy conditions". Operation Desert Storm began on the 16th. In the Islamic Moon diary, the period between sundown on these dates was one of the most dire possible. An image of Saddam's face on the Moon was reported. A rumour in Tunisia held that a woman was visited by an unknown saint; the apparition told her to open her Koran and if she found a hair trapped between the pages, it would mean Iraq would win. (She did – so not a reliable portent). **FT57:6–7**

Perhaps oddest of all were the attempts by at least two ultra-orthodox Jewish groups to curse Saddam with an ancient ritual called *pulsa de nura* (Aramaic for 'lash of fire'). Apparently, it stems from a Talmudic legend about Rabbi Hiyya and his sons, reputed to have mystical powers. When Elijah the Prophet was discovered to have taught them magic he was punished with 60 lashes of fire. The *pulsa* ritual involved a paper bearing the names of Saddam and his mother being burned at midnight in the burial cave of Dan, the son of Jacob. **FT57:9**

This month, the people of Pondicherry in southern India were frightened by an apparition of a "many-eyed goddess". The image of a woman with "eyes all over her face" was first seen walking around a village by a resident. Soon rumours abounded that the goddess Mariamman (aka Mari or Amman), who has oversight of disease and fertility and is worshipped mainly by Tamils, was touring the area and shops and vehicles were festooned with neem leaves, believed to be a favourite of the goddess. **FT60:7**

JANUARY 2001

A psychiatrist who is madder than his patients might be the stuff of fiction – but this month, the parents of Stephen Drummond, an autistic 30-year-old, successfully sued Donald Dudley for $2.1 million, after he left their son in a "terrified and delusional state". From 1980 to 1992, Drummond's psychotic episodes and "ranting about Navy Seals and killing children and police officers" made his parents question Dudley's care. They discovered that Dudley, by his own admission, had administered sodium amytal along with hypnotic suggestion to wipe and then reprogramme Drummond's mind. His grand plan was to create his own army of Manchurian Candidates "to take over hospitals, police-forces and schools". Dudley, a respected professor at the University of Washington Medical School, had his license withdrawn after a diagnosis of manic depression. **FT144:7**

William Bartron, 28, of Pennsylvania, accidentally cut off his hand with a power saw, but an amazing shock-induced logic took over. To ease the pain, he shot himself repeatedly in the head with a nail gun. Surgeons not only re-attached his hand, they removed 12 inch-long nails from his skull. **FT145:10**

When Stuart Spencer, a retired printer from Norfolk, finished a 1,000-piece jigsaw, he was astonished to notice the scene contained a tiny image of his wife Anne, who had died in 1997. The puzzle had been bought in Swindon by their daughter Trudi for his birthday, and was made by a German company from a photo of The Swan pub in Horning, Norfolk, a few miles from where they used to live. She had no idea her mother was in the picture. **FT145:14**

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G = LITTLE HOWLER	DT190520	0-3 3-6 6-9	BABYGROW	£8.99
H = INFERNO	WR123704	XXL XL L M	LS ALLOVER PRINT	£19.99
I = LITTLE DEATH	DW118520	0-3 3-6 6-9	BABYGROW	£8.99
J = LACE CORSET	PL243	XL L M S	DRESS	£29.99

COMPLETE THE ORDER FORM BELOW, DETACH & POST TO US WITH YOUR CHEQUE OR POSTAL ORDER TO: SPIRAL DIRECT LTD, SPIRAL HOUSE, 29 - 35 GLADSTONE ROAD, CROYDON, SURREY, CR0 2BQ.
OR BY CREDIT CARD SIMPLY ORDER ON OUR FREEPHONE HOTLINE 0500 000 880 DURING 10AM & 8PM WEEKDAYS. WWW.SPIRALDIRECT.COM

Order Form

CODE	PRODUCT	SIZE	QTY	VALUE
TR160123	EXAMPLE One Shoulder	L	1	11.99

BIZARRE JUNE 2010

*PLEASE ADD 95P + £1 PER ITEM FOR POSTAGE & PACKAGING (E.G. 2 ITEMS = £2.95)

SPIRAL GUARANTEE!
FULL REFUND OR EXCHANGE WITHIN 10 DAYS OF PURCHASE IF YOU ARE NOT FULLY SATISFIED.

*P & P £ 0.95P +£1 PER ITEM
TOTAL £

PLEASE CONTINUE ORDER ON A SEPERATE SHEET IF REQUIRED

NAME TEL NO
PLEASE FILL ALL DETAILS IN CLEAR CAPITAL LETTERS
ADDRESS
POSTCODE COUNTRY

PAYMENT METHOD: *SIGNATURE *REQUIRED TO AUTHORIZE ORDER
PLEASE TICK THE APPROPRIATE BOX (MAKE ALL CHEQUES & POSTAL ORDERS (GBP) PAYABLE TO 'SPIRAL DIRECT')
CHEQUE(UK ONLY) ☐ POSTAL ORDER ☐ MASTERCARD ☐ VISA ☐ MAESTRO ☐ AMEX ☐

CREDIT CARD NUMBER :
START DATE EXPIRY DATE ISSUE No CVV2 No
CVV2 = THE LAST 3 DIGITS ON REVERSE OF CARD (4 DIGITS FOR AMEX)

SPEND OVER £20 & GET A QUALITY T-SHIRT FREE>>
MEN'S (BLACK) ☐ XL ☐ L ☐ M
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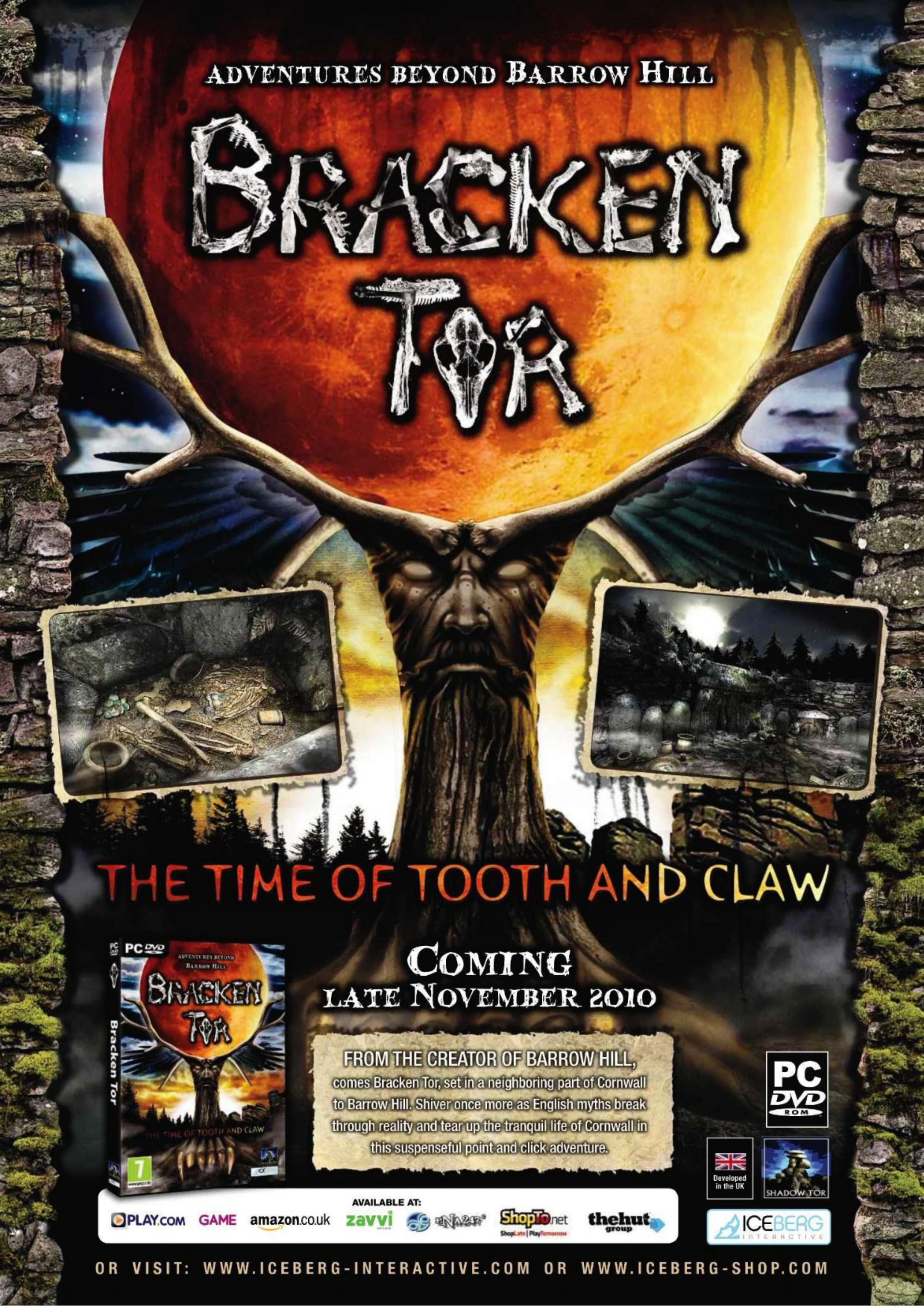
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